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CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN WORLD

A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR RELIGION

FROM MOSES TO THE PRESENT DAY

BY

D. C. SOMERVELL, M.A.

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CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN WORLD

ITS RISE AND PROGRESS TO THE FALL OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

BY

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WALLINGFORD

LONDON

G. BELL AND SONS, LTD.

1927

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PREFACE

It will be generally admitted that the study of primitive Christianity is, to a large number of people, a sealed book. They are familiar with a few of the better known martyr-stories, they have probably heard the phrase "*Athanasius contra mundum*"; but there their knowledge ends. It seems to me to be unfortunate that early Christian history is so seldom taught in our great schools, because, from whatever point of view we approach it, it is of supreme importance to a right understanding of the political and social life of Europe in subsequent ages. All students of modern history are familiar with the fact that the church was the greatest and most powerful corporation of the Middle Ages—when men could not conceive of life apart from Communes, Guilds or Corporations of some sort or another. Yet to so many, the story of how the church gained this position of supreme influence is almost entirely unknown.

In the following pages I have tried to show how and why this prestige and influence was obtained. I began to work at it as the result of a suggestion that it would be useful for the upper forms of public schools if a book could be written which would "Christianize the appropriate chapters in Gibbon." That has been my 'text' throughout, and with that ideal in mind, it will at once be understood that this is not a 'Church History' in the ordinary sense of the words. There are plenty of excellent books which tell the story, from year to year and epoch to epoch, and a short bibliography at the end of the present volume will help the student who desires to make a serious study of the subject. But I have

EMPERORS.	IMPERIAL EVENTS.	CHRISTIAN EXPANSION.	NOTABLE PERSECUTIONS.
	c. 205 B.C. Cybele brought to Rome. *c.* 100 B.C. Isis worshipped in Rome. *c.* 70 B.C. Spread of Mithraism.		
B.C. A.D. 27– 14. AUGUSTUS.	Revival of Native Religions of Rome.		
14– 37. TIBERIUS.	Persecution of Isis cult.		
41– 54. CLAUDIUS.	Spring Festival of Cybele at Rome.	*c.* 50. Christian Church established at Rome.	
54– 68. NERO.	64. Burning of Rome.		64. Persecution at Rome. ? Martyrdom of St. Paul.
79– 81. TITUS.	70. Fall of Jerusalem.		
81– 96. DOMITIAN.		90. In Bithynia.	96. 2nd Persecution. Clement.
98–117. TRAJAN.	Jerusalem renamed Aelia Capitolina.	100. General in Asia Minor.	115. 3rd Persecution. Ignatius.
117–138. HADRIAN.	Mithraism rampant.		155. Polycarp at Smyrna. Justin Martyr.
138–161. ANTONINUS PIUS.			
161–180. MARCUS AURELIUS.		*c.* 170. In Rhone Valley.	177. 4th Persecution. Rhone Valley.
180–192. COMMODUS.	Beginning of decline of Rome.	*c.* 180. In Africa.	180. Persecution at Scili.
193–211. SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS.	Isis, Osiris, Mithra worship current.	183. At Alexandria.	5th Persecution.
211–217. CARACALLA.	Universal citizenship in Empire.		
222–235. ALEXANDER SEVERUS.	Pressure from Barbarians.		235. 6th Persecution (Theban Legion).
235–238. MAXIMINUS.			Attack upon the Clergy.
249–251. DECIUS.	Goths cross Danube	*c.* 250. In Spain. Letter to Cyprian	7th Persecution and Edicts.
253–260. VALERIAN.			258. 8th Persecution. Cyprian.
261–268. GALLIENUS.	Proclaimed toleration for Christianity.		
270–275. AURELIAN.			9th Persecution (so called).
284–305. DIOCLETIAN.	Division of the Empire.	*c.* 303. St. Alban martyred in Britain.	303. Final Persecution and Edicts.
305–311. GALERIUS.	Six Emperors.		311. Edict of Toleration by Galerius.
312–323. LICINIUS CONSTANTINE.	312. Battle of Milvian Bridge. Battle of Scutari.		313 Edict of Milan.
323–337. CONSTANTINE (Sole Emperor).	Constantinople becomes Capital.	325. Council of Nicaea.	

IMPORTANT EVENTS TO 323 A.D.

SCHISMS AND HERESIES.	THE CATECHETICAL SCHOOL	PAGAN WRITERS.	CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.
		17 A.D. Ovid died.	
c. 50 A.D. Judaistic controversy.		*c.* 40. Philo.	
c. 50–220. Gnosticism.		65. Seneca died.	
			c. 80–100 A.D. The 'Didache.'
		100. Josephus died. *c.* 112 Pliny's Letters. 113. Tacitus died.	
c. 150. Montanism in Phrygia. Marcion at Rome.	*c.* 175. Pantaenus in Alexandria.	*c.* 125. Plutarch died.	*c.* 150. Justin Martyr's 'Apology.'
		c. 178. Celsus' 'True Word.'	*c.* 140. Shepherd of Hermas.
c. 202. Tertullian joins Montanists.	*c.* 150–211. Clement of Alexandria.	*c.* 180. Lucian of Samosata.	*c.* 120–202. Irenaeus. *c.* 160–220. Tertullian.
c. 220. Hippolytus at Rome.	*c.* 202–232. Origen mainly at Caesarea.		
251. The Lapsed at Carthage. Novatianism.	249–266. Dionysius of Alexandria.	240. Ammonius Saccas. 250. Plotinus. Neo-Platonism.	248–257. Cyprian, 'De Lapsis,' 'De Unitate Ecclesiae,' etc.
	c. 260–270. Paul of Samosata. Bp. of Antioch.		
311. Beginning of Donatist Schism.	*c.* 311. Martyrdom of Lucian of Antioch.	305. Death of Porphyry.	
Arian controversy begins.			

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CHAPTER I

THE PREPARATION OF THE WORLD

THERE is no ' splendid isolation ' in the progress of mankind. No one event, however startling or entirely new and unexpected it may seem, stands alone, separate, unrelated. Its beginnings lie deep in the too readily forgotten past, its influence can often be felt far down the ages. So it is with the appearance of Christianity in the world. No simpler or more constant illustration of the truth of this contention can be found than the addition of the letters B.C. or A.D. to date lists. Of one event at least in the history of the world it can be said, that all things led up to it, and now look back to it as the central fact of history. The birth of Christ marks not so much the conclusion as the completion of all that had preceded it, and while it gives a new direction to the march of progress, it fills all subsequent history with a new content and new meaning, rather than creates a new world unrelated to all that had gone before.

Yet in a very real sense Christianity was a new thing. Its claims were startlingly novel ; the results of the preaching missions of the first disciples were so extraordinary that it was said of them that they had turned the world upside down ; it displayed unmistakeably a moral beauty and sense of brotherhood such as had never been seen

before. Had the Christian religion been only a new expression of the common religious ideas of the time, it could never have produced such results in the moral and social life of the Roman Empire; had it been an entirely new invention—admirable no doubt in all respects—it would have failed to win over the world. Man, even in his most revolutionary moments, is essentially conservative at heart, and will only accept something new if he can be satisfied that it has its roots in previous experience. It was therefore the appeal of the church to old no less than to new, which gained her a hearing, at all events among the educated classes.

There are three main threads in the woof of preparation which need our attention, if we are to understand why it was that the birth of Christ occurred at a moment in the history of the world most favourable for the growth of the religion He came to found. The first of these is the Jewish preparation.

THE JEWISH PREPARATION

The Jew has been called the middle man of the religious world, and the simile is apt, geographically and theologically. With a genius for religion and a loftiness of theological conception, he stood midway between East and West, on that narrow ridge of country which was the scene of Christ's personal ministry. His sacred literature, incomparable in its beauty and possessing in the prophetic writings an unique power of attraction for the soul of man, and his sense of the majesty and holiness of the One and Only God, gave him a prestige and assured him a place in the minds of thinking men, however much they might despise him as an individual. Judaism claimed to be a

revealed religion and to be the vehicle of truth to the world, as did no other religious system. Its conception of God, and its teaching of the moral obligations of man towards God and towards his fellow Jew, stand alone and beyond all comparison with even the loftiest conceptions of the pagan world.

As the first missionaries of the gospel went up and down declaring their messages of salvation through Christ, they continually appealed to the Old Testament scriptures in support of their arguments. It was from the Law and the Prophets that Saul, after his conversion, confounded the Jews at Damascus, proving that 'this is very Christ.' [1] The Jews derived their hope of a Messiah from the spiritual history of their race recorded in those scriptures. They had gone into captivity in Babylon as a nation; they returned to their native land filled with the sense that they were the assembly of the Lord. That assembly (in the Greek sense *Ecclesia*) was to be the instrument of God for the fulfilment of His purposes in the world. Out of it was to be born One who should lead the chosen people to the glory promised by the prophets of old, a Messiah under whose leadership they would be victorious over all enemies and compel all nations to submit to His rule. They pointed to the scriptures as containing the proofs of this hope, and the apostles used those same writings to prove that Christ was the fulfilment of all prophecy, the Messiah of whom those prophets had spoken. Such a conclusion was frankly unpopular, and was rejected by most of those who first heard it; but the scriptural passages upon which the apostles relied in support of their argument were familiar not only to the Jews, but to that large body of Gentile hearers who gathered round the

[1] Acts ix. 22.

synagogues in all the cities of the Empire where Jews had settled.

From the days of the Babylonish captivity (586-530 B.C.), colonies of Jews were to be found in practically every city of the civilized world, even as far west as Rome. While they maintained their individuality of race and religion, they were influenced, inevitably, by the outlook of their neighbours. They familiarized men with the idea of a nation within a nation, owning allegiance to a God alien to the gods of their fellow townsmen, yet living in loyalty to the political system in which they found themselves. Thus they paved the way for the church as a society within the great society of the Empire, having no disruptive designs or disloyal aspirations, distinct from, yet in harmony with their neighbours.

These Jews of the Dispersion spoke Greek, and were naturally influenced by Greek thought. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament scriptures, which was a translation from the Hebrew into Greek, had been undertaken by Jews settled in Alexandria, and was completed about 250 years before the birth of Christ. The publication of the Jewish sacred books in a language familiar all the world over, had tremendous consequences. It weakened the barriers between Jew and Gentile by making a knowledge of Jewish faith and customs readily accessible to all, and so it helped to break down that isolation which had hitherto effectually prevented any intercourse between them. It was due to the intercourse of mind, thus established, that there grew up in Alexandria a school of Jewish philosophy which was of great importance in clothing Judaism with Greek thought. It numbered among its adherents at the beginning of the Christian era Philo [1]

[1] See article ' Philo ' in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church.*

who, though not himself a Christian, was held in high esteem by the fathers of the early church. His combination of Hebrew and Hellenic thought was known to the Apologists from Justin Martyr onwards, and the Christian catechetical school at Alexandria, under Clement and Origen, owed much to him in its Christological discussions.

But the fact that Judaism was the cradle of the Christian church had its disadvantages. It was almost inevitable that the new faith should be confused with the Jewish religion whence it had sprung. Although thoughtful pagans might respect the lofty moral and spiritual teaching of the Old Testament, philosophers and the uneducated masses alike, despised and hated the Jew as an individual. Some reasons for this hatred are dealt with in a later chapter ;[1] it is sufficient for our present purpose to draw attention to it, in order to show that this hatred was a serious obstacle to the apostles and early evangelists, when they attempted to deliver their message to Gentile audiences. Yet again, while the Gentile was often openly hostile to Christianity because of its Jewish background, the Jew hated the Christian preacher because, though he was a Jew, he seemed so lightly to brush aside some of the most cherished beliefs of the creed of Israel. The organized hostility of the Sanhedrin, and the more subtle opposition of those Jews within the church who wished to impose the whole Mosaic law upon Gentile converts, or to prevent the entrance of Gentiles into the church at all, gravely hampered the work of expansion and finally brought about a complete severance between the church of the old dispensation and the new.

Yet in the long run these obstacles were found to be

[1] Chap. iv.

sources of strength rather than of weakness. Its Jewish origin, though it might provoke hostility, gave the new community a realization of its essential unity with the past history of God's chosen people. The apostles, from the beginning, seem to have grasped the truth that though their message was in a sense new, it was also far more the old message of God, delivered through the prophets in type and symbol, and now openly declared in the person of His Son, the Messiah of whom those prophets had spoken.

Again, though Christianity was rejected by the Jewish nation, and scoffed at as a new sect, this break with the religious institutions of their fathers was not only inevitable, but was most valuable to the infant church. The apostles learnt through the bitter experience of national rejection, to regard themselves as independent of any national backing, as being a society unhampered by the limitations of racial and social barriers. In short, if the sense of the universality of the gospel message did not spring from it, it was immensely strengthened by the fact that almost from the beginning the church had to stand alone, and apart from the established religion of its Jewish home.

THE GREEK WORLD

It is natural to think of the Jewish preparation first, since Judaism is essentially the cradle of Christianity; but of hardly less importance is the influence of Greece. The conquests of Alexander the Great, three hundred years before the birth of Christ, had results of the most far-reaching importance. Greek influence spread over the East from Egypt to India, and Greek cities were founded, particularly in Asia Minor, where Greek culture

continued to mould men's thoughts long after the East had submitted to the Roman legions. The Greek tongue was everywhere spoken in Asia Minor and beyond, and paved the way for travel and commerce, as the Roman roads paved it in the literal sense in a later age. But important though this *lingua franca* was in opening up trade routes and making general intercourse between East and West easy of attainment, the effect upon the intellectual outlook of the old world is almost incalculable. Of western languages none is so subtle or so capable of accurately conveying ideas as is the Greek. Thus when the Christian theologians came to write down their beliefs in the formal statements of creeds, they had ready to hand a language which could give expression to their thoughts, and adequately define what they believed about the person of Christ or the nature of the Trinity.

Similarly the philosophic literature of Greece was invaluable to the church in the early formative centuries of her life. Socrates, and Plato his great pupil, or Aristotle, may have had but little direct influence upon the world when Christ was born ; their political thought was suitable for the pre-Alexandrine city-state rather than for the loose federation of nations which Alexander's conquests and the building up of the Roman empire brought about, but their moral teaching was the basis of all subsequent philosophy. Zeno the Stoic (B.C. 270 *c.*), and, in the time of Christ, Seneca, drew freely from the works of these great teachers, though it would be a mistake to suppose that Stoicism is simply a development of Platonism. The Greek Christian apologists, of whom Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are the most famous, thought of Christ, the Logos or Word of God, as first revealing Himself to men through the philosophy of the

Greek masters and finally declaring Himself openly in the Incarnation.

In the sphere of religion in the narrower sense also, the Greek world actively prepared the way for Christ. The grosser superstitions of an earlier day were succeeded by a purer conception of godhead. The East was especially the home of mystery cults,[1] often crude, sensual, barbarous, and for the most part having their origin in nature myths. In the course of time, however, contact with Greek thought enabled them to disguise, if not to shed much of their original coarseness, and outwardly, at any rate, they laid greater stress upon moral purification and the hope of a life beyond the grave. The Eleusinian mysteries, Greece's own and most famous mystery cult, probably had but little influence upon Christian thought; its secrets were jealously guarded, and its privileges were reserved for the educated alone. But the general effect of Greek thought upon the mystery religions of the East played no small part in that religious syncretism which was the chief feature of the religious life of the first three centuries A.D., and reacted to some extent upon the sacramental system of the church. Baptism and the Eucharist, little indeed as they have in common with the taurobolium of Cybele, or the lustrations of Eleusis, were not, to the Greek convert, wholly new or startling methods of approach to God; he was familiar with the idea of sacramental union between God and man, and so St. Paul's teaching concerning the nature and effect of baptism, in his Epistle to the Romans, was the more readily understood by the Greek-speaking community.

As with Judaism, so also with Hellenism: its influence upon the early church and its work of preparation was

[1] See chap. ii. for fuller treatment of the Mystery cults.

not without certain difficulties. The fusion of Hebrew with Greek and semi-Greek speculation, brought forth a crop of heresies when Christian thinkers began to develop a formal theology concerning the Person of Christ. Gnosticism[1] especially traces its origin to Greek speculation. It attempted to take over the current philosophic thought and combine it with the redemptive work of Christ, and it caused much heart-searching and controversy in the second and third centuries A.D. And yet it is a mistake to regret these speculations, nor does it seem fair to speak of them as being obstacles. In the long run they were of great benefit to Christian theology: they compelled clear thinking; they forced Christian apologists to define in clear-cut language what they believed about the Incarnation and the Trinity, the problem of evil and the nature of the soul. They prevented vagueness of statement or of belief in the fundamental dogmas of Christianity, and thus errors could be the more easily recognized and corrected. At the same time the breadth of view, which a study of Greek literature alone could give, enabled the church to avoid that narrowness of outlook, or to be content with a statement less adequate than truth demanded, which too often in her subsequent life has caused men to stumble or to depart from her fellowship.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Undoubtedly the Greek contribution to the work of preparation was the most important on the intellectual side, but in practical life the debt to Rome is beyond reckoning. The history of 'Ifs' cannot be written, but it is difficult to see how the gospel message could have

[1] See chap. vii.

spread, if it had not been for the political dominance of Rome throughout the world when the apostles began to preach.

Joseph and Mary went up to Bethlehem in obedience to a command of Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. 'All the world' was no idle boast prompted by overweening pride; it was almost literally true that all that men knew of the world, and all that was civilized, was included in the Roman Empire. Professor Gwatkin [1] speaks of the Mediterranean as a 'Roman lake,' but Roman jurisdiction extended far beyond its shores. By 100 A.D. the boundaries of the Empire may be thus roughly delineated: on the North: Scotland, the Rhine, the Danube (though Dacia lay to the north of it), and the Black Sea. On the East: The South-Western shore of the Caspian Sea, the kingdom of Persia, and the Arabian desert. On the South: the African desert. On the West: the Atlantic Ocean. No civilized nation, as the Mediterranean dweller understood civilization, threatened Rome's frontiers, except Persia, which was always a source of anxiety. There was ample opportunity within the wide confines of her territory for the development of art and industry, of science and law; and the legions who preserved the *Pax Romana* by ceaseless watch, and occasional warfare on Hadrian's wall, or on the edge of the African desert, must have seemed very remote from the every-day life of Rome or Ephesus. In a finely descriptive passage Gibbon thus sums up the general outlook of the citizens of the time:

> 'Dazzled with the exterior sway, the irresistible strength and the real or affected moderation of the

[1] *Early Church History to* 313 A.D., chap. iv.

emperors, they permitted themselves to despise, and sometimes to forget, the outlying countries which had been left in the enjoyment of a barbarous independence ; and they gradually usurped the licence of confounding the Roman monarchy with the globe of the earth.'[1]

But this pride may be forgiven when it is remembered that, as Gibbon goes on to point out, the Empire was more than 3000 miles long and 2000 miles broad, that it was situated in the finest part of the temperate zone, and that it was supposed to contain more than 16,000 square miles of fertile and well-cultivated land.

Hardly less remarkable than its far-flung frontiers was the tranquillity which almost universally prevailed within them. The subject peoples settled down to a happy obedience under the Roman yoke, apparently regarding their conquerors as benefactors rather than intruders, and the Empire was singularly free from internal strife in its early years. This was due in part to military superiority, but even more to the wonderful network of roads which, with posts established at every five or six miles through their entire length, made travelling easy and safe. It has been maintained that travel was easier and safer in the days of St. Paul and until the invasions of the Goths in the fifth century, than at any subsequent period, till the coming of the steam engine superseded road travel in Europe. From the Forum in Rome roads ran out to the frontiers in all directions, roads of amazing durability, pursuing their course with little deviation for mountain or river, and connecting the cities which grew up upon them with one another and with Rome. Many such cities were themselves radiating points for local road systems, so that

[1] *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. i. chap. i.

over a wide area, isolation and the sense of being 'off the beaten track' was impossible. Though they were primarily designed for the swift movement of troops, these roads became the natural arteries of commerce, and stimulated intercourse between East and West, which bore fruit in intellectual and religious life, no less than in commercial and military activity. Men wonder at the ceaseless travelling of St. Paul and the extent of his journeys, perhaps even as far as the pillars of Hercules; wonderful feats of endurance they certainly were, but they were probably accomplished with less fatigue, and in general, with less risk, than a pilgrimage from Canterbury to Rome in the days of the Norman kings. As Harnack[1] has pointed out, the fact that a Phrygian merchant visited Rome seventy-three times in his life, should never be forgotten.

All roads led from Rome. All roads in turn led back to Rome. As the merchant tramped from town to town offering his wares for sale, he would be met or passed by officers of the Emperor, bearing important despatches, perhaps from Rome to Carlisle, and he would be perforce reminded of the greatness and unity of the Empire, and of the long arm of Rome which everywhere held him in its embrace. The road was a symbol of the universality of the Empire; it must have been to the Christian evangelist a parable of the universality of the gospel message and of the church.

Not less important in its bearing on early Christian thought was the *Civitas Romana*. The rights of citizenship, so jealously preserved for native-born Romans in the days of the Republic, were gradually extended, first to individuals, then to cities and communities, and at last,

[1] *Expansion of Christianity*, vol. i. p. 21.

by a decree of Caracalla in 217 A.D., to all free citizens of the Empire. It will be remembered with what pride Paul answered the chief captain at Jerusalem, who said of his citizenship 'With a great price obtained I this freedom' —'But I was free born.' His right of formal trial before punishment, and of appeal to the Emperor's hearing, stood him in good stead in the face of the angry Jewish mob, and doubtless had often aided him in his journeys. The imagery of the Christian citizenship in heaven, which is so prominent in his Epistle to the Philippians, owed its inspiration to the pride which he felt in his earthly citizenship in Rome, and increased that sense of the universality of the gospel. He was sent to deliver a message, so he believed, of universal citizenship in the heavenly empire, without barrier of class or birth or blood, free and open to all through baptism.

It was a wise insight which led the government of so cosmopolitan an empire to tolerate all religions, unless and until it could be shewn that they were either vicious, or were being used as a cloak for treasonable conspiracy against the well-being of the state. Thus in its infancy the church had no fear of opposition simply on the ground of being Christian. 'So many men, so many creeds,' might well sum up the official attitude towards the differing beliefs and religious practices of the subject races. St. Paul definitely orders obedience to the civil power: 'He is the minister of God to thee for good'; so he writes to the Roman Church. Such an attitude would hardly have been possible had he experienced official opposition because of his preaching; the persecution which he suffered came from his own countrymen and the leaders of the synagogues, in the cities he visited beyond the borders of Syria. Wherever trouble arose because of his

preaching, he was given protection by the governor so soon as his position as a *civis Romanus*, and the reason for the tumult, were understood. So it was that when the Neronian persecution broke out in 64 A.D., Christianity had had sufficient time, owing to the previous policy of toleration, to establish itself. Small in numbers though the church was, the seed sown in the early days of peace proved too hardy in growth to be destroyed by fear of the sword or of the beasts in the arena. Though the persecutions undoubtedly delayed the universal acceptance of Christianity, they so braced and purified the infant church, that she was spared much of the corruption which would almost certainly have followed an easy and unbroken tolerance.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

The following chapter deals at length with the general religious development within the Empire up to the Peace of the Church in 313 A.D.; it is only necessary therefore, at this stage, to summarize the general religious and social outlook of the world into which Christ came, in order to show how it helped or hindered the first missionaries.

First and of supreme importance is the common yearning for redemption. The word can hardly be used in the sense in which the doctrine of redemption was worked out by Christian theologians in later centuries; but thoughtful men everywhere, were seeking release for the soul from the toils of the world, the hindrance of the flesh, and the fear of the unknown after death. This redemption could be obtained, so it was believed, only through knowledge of the nature of the Godhead and of the soul, and by initiation into the sacramental rites of the ' Mysteries.'

The Oriental cults, which grew so rapidly in favour

between 150 B.C. and 300 A.D., owed much to their ability to satisfy, in part, this yearning. The initiates who formed the inner circle, approached their gods through sacramental rites which bestowed upon the believer illumination of mind and cleansing of soul. There was, further, a prevalent belief that redemption was already present, either through one of the old religions which only needed faithful adherents to bring about the salvation of the soul, or through some individual who would shortly reveal himself to the world, or who must be discovered, and whose commands must be obeyed. Something of this is evident in the classic passage in Vergil's fourth Eclogue :

> ' The last era of the song of Cuma has come at length ; the grand file of the ages is being born anew ; . . . at length a new generation is descending from on high. . . . Under thy conduct ' (the reference is to Pollio's consulship), ' any remaining trace of our national guilt shall become void and release the world from the thraldom of perpetual fear. . . . All lands shall produce all things ; the ground shall not feel the harrow, nor the vineyard the pruning hook. . . .' [1]

Though the reference is undoubtedly to the expected birth of a child to Octavian (Augustus), Vergil was but echoing the common belief and hope of a return to the golden age through a personal redeemer who might well be compared with the Messiah for whom the Jewish church waited.

Stoicism did much to purify men's conception of the nature of God and of man's relation towards Him, but it was also concerned, though in lesser degree, with the social problems of the age. Not one of the religions of the day seemed able to raise the moral tone of the indi-

[1] Vergil, *Eclogue IV.* (Conington's translation).

vidual, or to enlighten and quicken the corporate conscience concerning the crying evils so obvious in every city. The Stoic conception of the dignity of human nature led on inevitably to the realization of the brotherhood of man. Men like Seneca and Epictetus taught, and by the example of their private lives, emphasized the moral duty of rectitude and consideration on the part of masters towards their slaves. The Christian doctrine of the one family in Christ, summed up in St. Paul's passionate outburst, 'There cannot be Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman' (Colossians, iii. 11), was not an entirely new point of view. The early church, it is true, consisted largely of slaves and freedmen and the lower orders in the social scale, because her insistence upon equal fellowship with the noble, the rich, the free would naturally appeal to the outcast and down-trodden. But converts from the higher ranks of society were attracted to Christianity partly because it held out the hope of social harmony such as the Stoics had preached, and partly because the reasons it assigned for its acceptance as the basis of society rested upon infinitely higher sanctions than those of the pagan philosophers. The Stoics substituted humanity for nationality, and the way was paved by their teaching for the building up of a Christian society on the basis of brotherhood. That that society failed to live by the ideals it set before itself, and which the Stoics had indicated already, does not here concern us ; it is sufficient to point out that such was the ideal, that it appealed to the noblest minds of the time, and that it was able to lift men from degradation and despair to honourable and useful life in the state.

Such are the main threads in the woof of preparation ; such are the elements which together paved the way for

the coming of Christ and the acceptance of the religion He offered to men. Subsequent chapters deal at length with some of the obstacles which Jew and Greek and Roman alike flung in the path of its early evangelists. Quarrels about the law of Moses in its relation to the Gentile convert; speculative Greek thought giving rise to heretical teaching and all the anxious intellectual questionings springing therefrom; state opposition, even to the length of fire and sword;—all these things hindered for a time the growth of Christianity. But in the end, as the wisest of the Apologists and early writers seem to have realized, they were helps rather than hindrances, and they gave the church a sense of continuity with the age-long past, and courage and hopefulness in a glorious future for generations yet unborn.

CHAPTER II

ROME AND THE RELIGIONS OF THE EMPIRE

In his question to Christ—'What is Truth'—Pilate may have illustrated that *taedium vitae* which was so general a characteristic of the educated Roman in the last days of the Republic and the early centuries of the Christian era. It is certainly idle to deny that scepticism in religion was a marked feature in the life of the Empire, and the fashion long prevailed of picturing the world into which Christ came, as a world bankrupt of all religion, or perhaps more accurately, a world in which the old religions had utterly broken down, in which men of faith and virtue no longer existed. Yet such a picture is by no means complete: there was no such universal atheism as is sometimes supposed. The intellectual circles in which men like Seneca moved might publicly ridicule or privately reject the old beliefs, or refuse to accept the numerous cults which were conquering Rome, as Rome had conquered the lands whence those cults arose. But there was a background of generally accepted beliefs which never lost their hold upon the landowners or country farmers of Etruria or Campania or the humbler citizens of Rome itself. Gibbon's epigram that to the politicians all religions were equally useful, to the populace equally true, to the philosophers equally false, leaves out of account that general wistfulness,

that longing for a revelation which Vergil so aptly describes : '*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.*'

The truth is that two opposed tendencies characterize the period lying between the murder of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. and the revival of Paganism under Julian the Apostate in 361 A.D. The first of these is a drift towards utter religious destitution, the second an earnest striving after a universal religion which should bind men in their consciences no less than in their outward loyalty towards matters of ceremonial observance.

From one point of view it might be said that at no time in the history of Rome was there so marked an interest in religion as manifested itself in the first three centuries A.D. This chapter will show that Christian preachers were by no means the only people setting forth new religious beliefs, claiming to bring a new revelation, and, with considerable success, making proselytes in every corner of the Empire. On the other hand, it is true that much of that interest in religion had little connection with morals and conscience, at all events until nearly the end of the period under review. Even Mithraism, with all its exalted claims and its high spiritual tone, was in the last resort overcome by Christianity, mainly because it was linked up with nature-worship and the long, enervating history which lay behind the cult of Nature. Religious destitution was not due to a lack of interest in the things of the soul and the hope or fear of another world beyond the grave, but to the inability of the religions offered to men to win them to that moral perfection which they so sadly failed to attain.

It must, then, be borne in mind that Christianity in its early days was only one of many cults striving for recognition, and competition was keen. One by one the re-

ligions of the East gained favour and were recognized by the Emperor of the day; Christianity was only the last of these cults to receive the Imperial favour, and there can be little doubt that it would have been accepted as a *religio licita* far sooner than was the case had it been able to adopt that easy tolerance towards other religions which Isis or Mithra extended to the native beliefs of the countries which they penetrated. It will be useful, therefore, to consider these rival religious systems in some detail, and then to estimate their influence upon men's thoughts, as a preparation, albeit unconscious, for the final acceptance of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, and so of the world.

1. *THE OLD ROMAN RELIGION*

From the days of Hannibal to the reforms of Augustus, the old native religion of Italy was steadily losing its hold upon the loyalty of its devotees, and this is hardly to be wondered at when it is remembered that in one sense it scarcely was a native religion. Very early in the history of the Republic, Hellenic influence had made itself felt in the Roman mythology, and the gods of Greece had either become identified with those of ancient Rome or had superseded them in men's affections. Nature-worship, the foundation of most ancient religions, was in itself too indefinite for the practical, materialistic Roman mind: the powers of Nature must be clothed with a semi-human, semi-divine personality, and as the Roman abhorred abstractions, such virtues as Hope, or temporal blessings such as Wealth or Health were likewise personified. Thus, not only was the old religion Hellenised, but also the cult of that host of lesser deities—the 'little folk' who presided over every common action of daily life, and

round whose persons there centred a mass of superstition greatly increased. Although these 'little folk' did not enter into the scheme of the official religion of the Republic, they retained their popularity, whereas the religion of the State became less and less attractive.

The reasons for this decay are not difficult to find. The State religion was simply a department of the social and political system of the day; it made no appeal to heart or conscience; it was not concerned to formulate a creed or draw up a code of morals. It was a conglomeration of stories of the old gods of Rome or Greece, anthropomorphic in outlook, sometimes unedifying and having no power to lead men to higher ideals. The essence of this religion was the due observance of certain ceremonies at fixed seasons of the year. Its priests were officials of the State, and their duties, prescribed by law, involved no more than the punctual and liturgically accurate performance of the appointed services. Augury and divination, which formed a large part of their work, became the handmaids of every political intriguer who was rich enough to bribe the augurs. Thus the taking of the omens before any event of importance was looked upon as a venerable ceremony, a link with the old traditions of Rome's hardy and simple-minded forebears; but in all probability few of those who took part in it seriously believed in its reality. It is no wonder that in the last days of the Republic this formal and barren system should so far have lost its hold upon men that in many places the old temples erected by pious ancestors were neglected, and even, in some cases, in ruins; that it was often difficult to secure the performance of the old rites; that liturgical usage was being corrupted, and that even the names of the old gods were fading from memory.

From this formalism and decay men turned with something of relief to the familiar and intimate cult of the 'little folk.' The uneducated and partially educated classes surrounded themselves with a host of spirits, daemons, genii—the *Lares* and *Penates*, household gods—who either as guardian angels or ancestral spirits preserved the life of the individual and the family from generation to generation. Each family had its domestic god, the '*lar familiaris*,' whose image stood on the hearth in a little shrine, or in a small chapel known as the '*lararium*'; food was offered to it at every meal and on festival days it was crowned with garlands. From infancy the middle-class Roman child was steeped in the atmosphere of superstition in which the *Lares* and *Penates* took the most prominent place. No wonder that Tibullus could write: 'Keep me, Lares of my fathers, for ye bred me to manhood when, a tender child, I played at your feet.'

With superstition rampant among the lower and middle classes, with the influx of those Oriental religions which we shall presently have occasion to notice, with scepticism eating out the heart of the patrician, with the official State religion falling into such decay, it seems that Rome must have yielded herself utterly to the gods of Egypt or Syria. Augustus set on foot that revival of the old religion, and gave it a new form and content in the deification of the Emperor, which prolonged its life until the final triumph of Christianity, and made it appear, even until after the accession of Constantine, to be unassailably permanent.

When Octavius assumed the title of Augustus he took to himself a name vividly reminiscent of 'the majesty of Jupiter and the sanctity of all holy places and solemn

rites.' [1] Thoughtful men, sceptics though they might be, realized that the stability of the Roman commonwealth had been built up upon the character of their forefathers,[2] and Julius had begun that reformation, cut short at his death, which, during the lull which followed the battle of Actium in 31 B.C., Augustus endeavoured to complete. He determined to restore that *pietas* and *gravitas*, the twin foundations upon which Rome's early greatness had been built, in the political as well as in the moral life of the people. To this end he rebuilt the old temples, whose ruin and decay have already been noticed; he restored to their former wealth and dignity the ancient priesthoods and the sacred colleges of the *Salii* and *Arvales*, whose origins were older than that of the Republic itself; and, vesting himself with the office of Pontifex Maximus, exercised supreme control over the whole field of religion.[3]

Though political considerations were, of course, bound up with this restoration of religion, it would have been impossible for the work of Augustus to proceed so smoothly had popular opinion been hostile to him. The motives of a reformer are more sharply criticized than the excesses of a libertine, and the Imperial throne was as yet too insecurely established to have permitted the Emperor to enforce the re-establishment of the old faith upon an unwilling people. We are led to the conclusion, therefore, that in spite of its appearance of decay, the old religion still had considerable hold upon men's affections and imagination.

But the deification of the Emperor was the decisive factor in this revival and was productive of consequences

[1] Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, p. 533.

[2] *Moribus antiquis stat res Romana virisque* (Ennius).

[3] Mommsen, *Prov. of Roman Empire*, ii. p. 1022.

far beyond the immediate vision. Julius had received the title of '*divus*' after his death, and had been granted a place in the Pantheon and a shrine in the Forum; it was no long step to offer to a living Emperor, himself the Pontifex Maximus, summing up in his own person the most sacred associations of his city and her history, honours so readily given to the dead Caesar. Thus loyalty to the old religion became centred in loyalty to its living head, and the work of successive emperors during the next three hundred years, perhaps following, perhaps leading, public opinion, clothed their persons with a sanctity, a divinity, which came to be regarded as the embodiment of the Empire's political and spiritual life.

Private opinion in matters of faith remained as varied as in the pre-Augustan age. No fixed body of doctrine, no formulated creed was as yet submitted to the devotee for acceptance. Men might offer their wine and incense to the Emperor's statue with no devotion of heart, no intellectual reasoning or faith in their action, such as was essential in the performance of rites associated with the cults of the East or of Christianity. The old religion was still part of the official life of the State; it was still divorced from morality and the deepest instincts and desires of the human race. Yet for all this it paved the way for a monotheism which, first linking the emperor with Mithra the invincible, the god of Light, at last found its satisfaction in the revelation of God through Christ.

Though this fresh interest in religion is noticeable in all ranks of society, there was a small company of men who found in philosophy the answer to their soul's needs. In general it was Stoicism which moulded their outlook on life and supplied them with a theory of the universe which satisfied their enquiries. But the Roman Stoic

was not concerned, as the Greek Stoic of earlier days had been, chiefly with abstract speculation ; rather he might be spoken of as a moral philosopher. Partly because of the moral corruption and the atmosphere of intrigue which were inseparable from the life of the court, partly on account of the civil disorders which so constantly attended the accession of a new emperor, and partly because the new cults, everywhere so fashionable, seemed unable to unite religion and morality and so to rebuke the open profligacy of many of Rome's most famous citizens, the Stoic attempted to build up an inner life of his own in harmony with Reason, that vital principle ' whence all things come and in virtue of which they live.' [1] ' Harmony with Nature and with oneself is the ideal life ; this the outside world of emperors, freedmen, bereavements and accidents generally, can neither give nor take away.' [2]

There was something in this peculiarly attractive to the thoughtful Roman who reverenced his country's past glories and the dignity and simplicity of the lives of his ancestors. Philosophers of the Stoic persuasion taught him to regard himself as sharing the life of divine Reason, the σπερματικὸς λόγος, which brought unity into the confused elements of the world. Whatever disasters came upon him, however he might be oppressed by the tyranny of evil governors, he had an interior calm; he was secure in the assurance that, because of his own divinity, he had an unassailable fortress against the attacks of wicked men. Epictetus, who lived and taught at the end of the first century, declares : ' He who has once observed with understanding the administration of the world and

[1] Cf. Glover, *Conflict of Religion in Early Roman Empire*, p. 37.

[2] Glover, *op. cit.* p. 39.

learnt that the greatest and supreme and most comprehensive community is the system of men and God, and that from God come the seeds whence all things, and especially all rational beings spring, why should that man not call himself a citizen of the world, why not a son of God'?[1]

In its moral teaching, in its sense of individual responsibility to God for the way in which men used the gift of life, and to a considerable extent in its doctrine of the brotherhood of man, Stoicism approached more nearly to the Christian ethical standpoint than any of the religious or philosophic systems of the Empire.[2] But it failed to attract more than a small circle of men, and those the intellectuals, because of its stern rejection of the element of passion or emotion, its insistent appeal to cold Reason, and its ultimate inability to show to men God in concrete and tangible form. In his second Apology Justin Martyr says: 'I put myself in the hands of a Stoic and I stayed a long time with him; but when I got no further in the matter of God—for he did not know himself and he used to say that this knowledge was not necessary—I left him.' Men seek for authority in religion and for a divine personality whom they feel they can approach as individuals speaking to a Person, known and understood, and sympathetic to their supplications. The cults of the East supplied their needs in this respect as neither the old religion of Rome nor the speculations of the Philosophers could do, and to the consideration of these Eastern cults we must now turn.

[1] Glover, *op. cit.* p. 38.

[2] It is impossible to deal fully with Stoicism within the limits of this book. There are fascinating chapters upon its main tenets and exponents in Glover and Dill.

2. *THE ORIENTAL CULTS*

M. Cumont [1] declares that from the moral standpoint 'the history of the Empire during the first three centuries may be summarised as a peaceful infiltration of the Orient into the Occident.' In every department of life this is true: Rome's industry, wealth, science, and to some extent her art, owed much to the genius of those Eastern peoples whom the legions, recruited in the main from the West, had brought under the Roman yoke. Thus, as has already been noticed in this chapter, the peoples of the East, conquered by the sword, came West to triumph over their conquerors in commerce, in science, and perhaps most notably, in religion.

This religious conquest is explicable only on moral grounds. The austerity of the Roman creed, its frank erastianism, and the scepticism which seemed to be no bar to the due performance of its rites, failed to keep pace with that growing sense of individual responsibility and the need for personal purification and illumination, which in differing degrees, was stimulated or supplied by the worship of Magna Mater, of Isis, or, most conspicuously, of Mithra.

The Phrygian goddess Cybele, the Great Mother from Pessinus, was the first Eastern deity to invade Italy. Her worship in the West has a history extending over six centuries, for as she was the first to receive favour, so was she, along with Mithra, the last to yield to the Catholic Church. She had been brought to Rome in obedience to the command of the Sibyls, in the anxious days of the second Punic war, and in spite of much

[1] Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, p. 3 and note 2, p. 213 (Eng. Trans.).

opposition by the State, steadily won her way into the hearts of the populace.

The inhabitants of Phrygia had always been renowned for their excitability ; their religion, based upon emotionalism, and characterized by violent ecstasies, was often accompanied by orgies of a peculiarly revolting kind, which disgusted the stern Roman when first he saw the wild frenzies of the priests of Cybele. Yet that very emotionalism attracted the lower classes by its vulgarity, and when, as time wore on, its doctrines were spiritualized, it penetrated into the houses of Roman noble families. It is true that when the Great Mother first came to Rome she was welcomed by the proudest patricians, but so soon as the excesses connected with her worship were understood, the Senate passed restrictive decrees which drove her votaries to practise their religion, if not in secret, at all events without official recognition and goodwill, till, in the early days of the Empire, first Augustus, and then Claudius, restored or built temples in her honour and accorded to her the status of a '*religio licita*.'

Nature worship was the foundation of this Phrygian cult. Attis, a young herdsman, beloved of Cybele, the mother of all fertility, in repentance for faithlessness, unmanned himself under a pine tree and there died of his wound. Cybele, in wild grief, rushed through woods and mountains bewailing with piercing cries the loss of her lover. But Attis rose to life again and was restored to the bosom of his mourning lover, who was also, as some believed, his mother. Thus was symbolized the death of vegetation in Autumn, the raging of the winter storms, and the return of fertility to the earth with Spring and Summer.

The Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.) introduced the

Spring festival in honour of Attis and Cybele, which lasted from the 22nd to the 27th of March, thus covering the period of the vernal equinox. With wonderful and striking pageantry the priests of the Great Mother celebrated the death, burial, and resurrection of Attis and the joy of his lover at his return.[1] This festival, and indeed the whole worship of Cybele, was bound up with shameful orgiastic rites, but there was a deeper meaning than was apparent on the surface. The populace might be satisfied with the frenzies of the priests and the magnificence of the ritual : that would not account for the steady growth of the cult all over the West. ' The Mother of the Gods found her last and most gallant defenders among great nobles of high repute and sincere pagan piety in the last years of heathenism in the West. . . . A religion may deteriorate as its authority over society becomes more assured with age. But in time of moral renovation and in the face of powerful spiritual rivalries a religion may purge itself of the impurities of youth.' [2]

Such was the case with Cybele. As men sought ever more earnestly for a new spiritual message, for purification from sin and moral defilement ; as they looked more eagerly for the hope of a life beyond the grave, there grew up an inner circle of the Great Mother's devotees, who by sacramental means, obtained the longed-for absolution and the pledge of immortality. The 'Taurobolium' first appears in the West in the second century A.D., associated with this cult, and later, probably through the prevailing syncretism in religion, it seems to have been practised by the followers of Mithra. The candidate for initiation

[1] See Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, pp. 348-352, and M. Cumont, *op. cit.* pp. 56-57 for a full account of this most interesting festival.

[2] Dill, *op. cit.*, pp. 553-554.

into the inner mysteries knelt in a trench covered by a wooden grating whither was led a bull wreathed in garlands. There it was stabbed to death by a sacred spear and its blood drenched the novice, kneeling below to receive the sacred bath. When at last his whole body was scarlet with the blood of the victim he was received up from the pit and welcomed by the assembled congregation as one '*renatus in aeternum*.'[1] Not only, was it supposed, were his sins washed away in the blood of the bull, but further, he entered into the life of his god, and thereby received the promise of eternal life.

But however exalted and holy might be the aspirations of him who sought cleansing through the blood bath, however strong his hope of immortality to be gained thereby, the Phrygian religion was doomed to failure. Sooner or later men of culture were bound to perceive the wide gulf between the moral purity thus hoped for and the shameless debauchery of the painted eunuch priests who presided over the sacred mysteries of their religion. Time and again efforts were made to refine it and to bring it into a form which would satisfy the insistent demand for morality and a higher standard of life. All failed as they were bound to do, because no matter how spiritualised might be the interpretation of the mysteries, they were in origin based upon an unsavoury love affair; they allowed, or at least included ceremonies both sensual and dangerously emotional, and glorified the sacrifice of virility, a practice abhorrent to all decent-minded Romans, and, during the days of the Empire, forbidden by law.

Owing to the prevailing syncretism, already noticed,

[1] It has been suggested that this phrase was borrowed from the Christians, out of malice, by those who wished to discredit their baptismal ceremonies and promises.

which was so marked a feature of the religious development of the Empire, Cybele was able to prolong her life when her cult was taken under Mithra's all-embracing protection. Whereas Mithra was essentially the soldier's god, Cybele was able to supply for wives what he provided for their warrior husbands. As the process of refinement went on, as the more tender and maternal aspects of the Great Mother came more prominently into view, she was thought of as giving grace and peace through her cleansing rites; thus women, who were excluded from the worship of Mithra, found in her the satisfaction of their needs in the mystery of childbirth and motherhood.

Though Egypt is the home of Isis and Osiris, the Isiac worship which came to southern Italy, and perhaps to Rome, about the middle of the second century B.C. had undergone so great a transformation as to bear but little resemblance to the original Egyptian cult. The association between Greece and Egypt which was so close in later days had been at work about the Nile delta since the seventh century B.C., and the foundation of Alexandria aided the work of Hellenism in uniting the worship of Isis with that of Greece. Under the rule of the Ptolemies this syncretism was officially encouraged, and Egyptian priests of Isis and the Greek ministers of the Eleusinian mysteries worked hand in hand to bring the two religions into harmony. Thus it was a Hellenized cult which came to Rome, and this fact alone contributed much to its success. Though, like the religion of Phrygia, it was for long frowned upon, and fiercely persecuted by Tiberius, it finally numbered among its devotees Emperors who were foremost to build and enrich the temples of the Egyptian goddess.

The history of its origin and transformation, and of the opposition which it received from the Senate is too long to tell here ; we have only space to say something of its main tenets and of the reasons for its great popularity and ultimate decline.

The Isis myth [1] is bound up with that of her husband and brother Osiris, who is identified with Serapis, in whose honour the great Serapeum was built at Alexandria. Osiris, while still king upon Earth, had been hailed as a deity because of the beneficence of his rule and his skill in encouraging the growth of wheat, barley, and the vine. Arousing their envy, he was put to death by his brothers, Set and Typhon, and his body, enclosed in a coffin, floated out to sea. But Typhon, coming upon the body unexpectedly, while hunting in the marshes, rent it into fourteen pieces. Isis in grief wandered everywhere seeking the body of her lover, and at last, as she was sailing up and down the marshes of the Nile delta in a boat made of papyrus, she found the fourteen pieces. Weeping, she placed them in order, and breathing and mourning over them, finally restored them to life. Osiris revived and reigned as king of the dead, bearing the titles of Lord of the Underworld, Lord of Eternity, Ruler of the Dead.

Such in brief is the outline of the myth. Like that of Cybele it is partly a Nature legend, concerned with the sowing and harvesting of the corn. But Hellenized and spiritualized through centuries of development, its appeal to the Roman lay in its promise of resurrection and immortality. Further, because its theology was always vague and easily adaptable to the countries of its adoption, it fitted in with the growing belief in monotheism which

[1] The whole story is most attractively told in Frazer, *op. cit.* pp. 362 *seq.*

steadily gained favour in the centuries immediately preceeding the Peace of the Church.

Yet although its theology was so vague and its rites of purification concerned more with bodily cleansing than spiritual purgation when first it came to Italy, no religion held out so clear a hope of immortality, or of a state of blessedness beyond the grave, as did the cult of Isis and Serapis. It was not until Mithra the invincible absorbed into one system all the prevailing cults without obliterating their distinguishing features, that the way was prepared by that action for the acceptance of Christianity as the one world-religion.

The outer fringe of her devotees might be content with the ritual splendour of the daily services and the drama of the seeking and finding of the body of Osiris, with the loud jubilation which accompanied that resurrection when the feast was celebrated at the beginning of November each year. But there was an inner spiritual meaning behind all the outward pomp and ceremony which only the initiate could learn ; and in the mysteries of sacramental grace connected with it, he alone might share.

Osiris the god who died and rose again to life in the world beyond, was the forerunner or prototype of all who sought union with him in purity of life. If they carefully observed the rules laid down for them by the priests, if they had, here in the temples, sought spiritual understanding and union with the Lord of All in silent meditation, in prayer and sacramental meal, then, since by their initiation they had been born to more than human life, they would, beyond the grave, be caught up into the very life of the god himself and share the immortal glory to which Osiris had attained. This is the meaning of that prayer so often inscribed upon the tombs of the followers

of the Egyptian religion, ' May Osiris give you drink of the refreshing water,' by which is meant the water of immortal gladness.

And if Osiris could satisfy this craving for immortality, Isis, Queen of the living and the dead, spoke to men and women in the tender accents of suffering womanhood. She was the great power behind all Nature and yet was identified with the lives of her worshippers, so that in them she suffered the bitterness of grief or rejoiced in their moments of thanksgiving and jubilation. She more nearly than any heathen deity approaches the Virgin Mother of the Catholic Church. Sailors storm-tossed on the Mediterranean prayed to her, the patroness of mariners, as does the Breton fisherman to Mary to-day ; women mourning the death of husbands or sons sought comfort from the Mater Dolorosa, or committed their daughters to her protection as ' Queen of Peace.'

But the cult of Egypt failed as did that of Phrygia, because it contained in itself the seeds of corruption. It could not shake itself free from the grosser elements of the Nature worship whence it sprang, and it failed to lead men to a higher life of moral probity, in spite of all its stress upon inner purity of heart, because of the undoubted scandals, from time to time revealed, within its temple courts. Though progressively monotheist in outlook, it welcomed all the ancient gods into its system, and perhaps it was chiefly for this reason that it and all religions except Christianity, ultimately failed to gain supremacy. It might develop upon the lines of holiness of life, of personal devotion, of spiritual vision, but so long as it, or any other cult, followed the fashion of the day in extending a welcome to all religions, it was doomed to failure. The exclusive claims made by the Christians,

though at first a cause of bitter persecution, were in the end among the chief reasons which established their faith as the one religion of the Empire and so of the western world.

The religion of Mithra ' is perhaps the highest and most striking example of the last efforts of Paganism to reconcile itself to the great moral and spiritual movement which was setting steadily, and with growing momentum, towards purer conceptions of God, of man's relations to Him, and of the life to come.' [1] Several times in this chapter attention has been called to the steady growth of the idea of monotheism as being one of the most marked features of religious development in the first three centuries A.D. Mithra fostered that development as no other pagan religion could. The worship of the Sun, with which Mithra was closely associated, though in essence a form of Nature worship, was at once the purest form of elemental religion and most easily capable of monotheist conception since the Sun was manifestly the source of light and life.

M. Cumont [2] states that ' before religion had reached the point of proclaiming that God must be sought in the realm of the ideal and the absolute, outside the world of sense, the one rational and scientific cult was that of the Sun.' In the West Mithra was never identified with the Sun ; rather he was regarded as the equal and ally of the solar deity ; but in the days of his final triumph he had become the central figure in a divine hierarchy in which the Sun was the one supreme first cause of the created universe.

[1] Dill, *op. cit.* p. 585.

[2] Cumont, *Monuments relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, Introduction, p. 336.

As this First Cause, the supreme and awful Being, receded further from touch and sight of men, the need of a mediator between the far-off infinite Power and man became imperiously clamant of satisfaction. It was in his rôle of mediator that Mithra gained his immense popularity.

His cult may have come to the West with the conquest of the Cilician pirates by Pompey in 70 B.C., but there are no clear indications of its presence in Rome until nearly the end of the first century of the Christian era. From about 100 A.D., however, it spread with amazing rapidity, and as Christianity's last and most relentless rival, bid fair to gain complete ascendancy over the religion of the Cross. In every part of the Empire, from its eastern boundaries to Hadrian's wall, from Cologne to North Africa (though not so commonly here) inscriptions or chapels have been found to the honour of the Persian god.

His legend has been almost entirely lost, for no hymn or litany recounting his adventures has survived, as is the case with Isis or Cybele. The story has been pieced together from the numerous sculptures representing his exploits, and the following selections will illustrate the chief incidents of his life. One picture represents his birth : the boy was miraculously born out of ' mother rock.' As he emerges from the opening cave, round whose entrance a serpent, symbol of evil, is coiled, shepherds come to adore the hero and to offer him the first fruits of their fields and herds. In another scene the boy stands before a rock against which he shoots an arrow ; from the spot pierced by the dart a stream gushes forth and a figure kneeling below catches the life-giving water in his hands. There are several pieces of sculpture depicting in various scenes the legend of Mithra and the

bull : in one he is shown carrying the bull on his shoulders : in another he is himself borne on the animal's back holding on to its horns. Or, again, the scene depicts Mithra's victory over the bull which he has dragged into a cave and there, kneeling upon it, plunges his dagger deep into its neck. But the scene speaks not of death but rather of life : from the tail of the dying animal springs the young corn, and its blood gives life to the vine, whose fruit is used for the sacred wine of the mysteries. It might be, in origin, only a symbolic representation of the death of Nature in Autumn and the re-birth in Spring ; or the victory of Good over the powers of Evil ; but it spoke to the worshipper in assuring accents, of the new life beyond the grave : the wine of the mysteries was a pledge of immortality.

There has been much speculation about the meaning of these various scenes and many explanations have been offered. It has been suggested that Mithraism is only one more of the Nature cults and is primarily concerned with the procession of the seasons and their decay, and with the new life in trees and plants : or that it is dualist in origin. Persia is the home of the theory that there is a ceaseless warfare between the principles of good and evil (both of which are deified), and of light and darkness. So it has been conjectured that Mithraism, coming from Persia, is a form of dualism, and that Mithra, the invincible god of Light, triumphs over evil and the spirits of darkness who attend upon Evil, personified in Ahriman, the lord of the underworld, the Satan of Judaism. But whatever may have been its origin, when it came to Rome it had to a large extent shaken itself free from the coarseness of Nature worship, so marked in the other great cults of the East. In its moral purity, its spiritual vision, its com-

radeship and its hope for the future, it offered to men a religion immeasurably above anything they had yet received.

It came to Rome at a time when the need for moral and spiritual authority was most keenly felt. As mediator between the powers of good and evil, as victor in that strife, champion of truth and purity, yet always *contending* for the right, ever young, Mithra appealed irresistibly to the Roman soldier in the hardships of a campaign. As the legions carried the eagles into the remote fastnesses of Northumbria and there watched in ceaseless vigil against the attacks of the Pictish hordes, they remembered, as they endured the bleakness of the Northern winter, Mithra the god of Light, waging ceaseless, yet triumphant warfare, against the hosts of evil, and leading his faithful to the land of light and peace in the realms of the Sun god, giver of life and warmth and joy. Thus he was essentially the soldier's god.

But his promise of immortality was not lightly given ; the hope of life beyond the grave was dependent upon the manner of life lived here on earth. The soul of man, so it was taught, descended from God to dwell, a prisoner, in the flesh, and its mode of life while thus bound, determined its condition after death. The initiate believed that after death would come the great judgment at which the deeds done in this life would be passed in review. The good, the noble, the pure in heart and body would pass upward through seven spheres, being purged from all defilement in the course of their journey, till at length they would be received by Mithra in the land of light ; but those who had defiled themselves would be dragged down to realms of darkness and torment by Ahriman and his host of evil spirits. Finally, at the end of time,

Mithra would come again: the struggle between good and evil would end, the dead would rise from the grave, all that is evil would be destroyed by fire from on high, and the just would live with Mithra in endless life and light.[1]

Great, however, as were these promises, they were not the only or perhaps the chief reason for the universal popularity of Mithraism, or for its position as the chief religion of the Empire. Other religions, as we have seen, offered immortality to their devotees but failed to attain ascendancy over other cults. Political considerations played no small part in Mithra's triumph. Emperor-worship, the highest development of Rome's native beliefs, was inevitably, on political grounds forced upon the conquered peoples of the East, and they, regarding the Emperor as lord of the world in things temporal, soon extended his title to the world beyond. The title of *divus* granted by the Senate to each emperor, conveyed a meaning peculiarly attractive to his Eastern subjects, for while they could not apply the title *deus* to an earthly ruler, they regarded him as being in some special sense inspired by divine wisdom and power. The Sun god was the natural protector and guide of kings, as he was the source of light and life, and as his worship grew steadily in favour, Mithra the equal and ally of the Sun (if not identified with him) became the protector of the emperor and his dominions. It was natural and fitting, in view of this, that Commodus (180-193 A.D.) should adopt the title *Invictus*, hitherto reserved for Mithra alone.

In view of its high ethical standard and the powerful support of the Court, it may well be asked why a religion so favoured and so lofty in ideals had to yield at last to another cult from the East, that of Jesus Christ. Much

[1] Dill, *op. cit.* p. 609.

of the moral and eschatological teaching of Mithra had close affinities with the precepts of the Gospels as, for example, their promise of immortality and their solemn warning of judgment to come. So close indeed is the parallel that some of the Apologists, and notably Tertullian, regarded the sacraments of Mithra as a travesty of the sacramental system of the Church, invented by the evil one to bring about its downfall. Yet there are fundamental differences between the two religions, so vital that, though the struggle might be long and severe, the Cross was bound to triumph in the end. In the last resort Mithra could be no rival to Christ: lofty in moral tone he might be, but he could never offer to men that inexhaustible spring of spiritual strength which the divine and human life of Jesus supplies. His mysteries and the majesty of his worship, when finally analyzed, are seen to be but an elaborate symbolism of the processes of Nature linked up with the Sun, the lord of the natural world; but in Christ God spoke to men through human lips and revealed Himself through an earthly life, the like of which for its nobility, simplicity, and power mortal man had never seen.

Mithra's easy tolerance towards other religions was as fatal to his permanence as it had been to Isis and Cybele. As those cults were absorbed into the purer creed of the Sun god they lost much of their grossness and led men on to the higher conceptions of monotheism; but they could never rid themselves of the enervating association of their savage or unclean origin. The apostles and their successors set before men One, revealed from the bosom of the eternal Father, above and beyond all nature, yet touched with the feeling of our infirmities;[1]

[1] Hebrews iv. 15.

One Who while calling upon men to respond in love to love revealed, yet bade them so to order and discipline themselves in purity of heart and simplicity of living that there would be no room for excess of emotion or degradation of life. In rivalry with so sublime a Person and so lofty a creed, Persia's god had to yield, as Phrygia's and Egypt's gods had yielded to Mithra, just as in centuries still to come the gods of the hardy German and cruel Goth gave way before the advance of the Cross.

GENERAL RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS IN 300 A.D.

The fourth century was one of the most critical periods in church history: in its opening years Christianity was still a persecuted, forbidden religion; at its close it was established in all parts of the Empire as the one, official, universal religion, with a formulated body of doctrine and an established order of sacred ministers, whose authority was recognized in every city and village. The century witnessed the triumph of the church and the decay, if not the rout, of all other religions in the civilized world. Though under Diocletian (284-305 A.D.) these seemed to have attained unassailable supremacy as they sheltered beneath the kindly all-embracing tolerance of Mithra, their doom was already sealed. They had paved the way for Christian preachers, they had led men to look for redemption from sin and for a life of moral and spiritual perfection, but they had failed, each in turn, to bring men to the goal whither they pointed, or to supply them with the nourishment their souls were seeking. But their contribution was of supreme value in bringing men to the feet of Christ.

Belief in the unity of God was almost universal. For centuries past the Jew had proclaimed that God is One,

Alone, Supreme, and many of the philosophers were teaching the same truth. Seneca had spoken of Him as the Creator of the Universe, the incorporeal Reason, the secret power within man making for righteousness : to Plutarch, the gods of all nations were the same by whatever names they might be called. It is not a long step from the conception of unity in essence to declare that there is only one First Cause and moral Governor of the world. It was on this account that all cults were fused into the one worship of the Sun and his ally Mithra. We have noticed this syncretism several times in the course of this chapter ; the reason for it is clear when it is remembered that not only the philosopher and the intellectual, but the ordinary citizen had ceased to believe in the company of gods and goddesses, and was seeking for the One Being who moved, by ordered paths, behind the forces of Nature and the inequalities of life.

Belief in the unity of God led men, naturally, to seek for a one, universal religion ; and political events played their part in fostering such an idea. There was one Empire and one ruler of the one world-state binding all in a common loyalty to one city ; should there not be one religion, binding men in a spiritual unity parallel to their political unity ? Mithra almost achieved this end, but his tolerance of other deities was a fatal barrier to success. The claim of the Church to declare exclusively to man the One and only God, and to bring all men into the fellowship of the one divine society, was at last accepted as the God-revealed plan for unity in faith as in political life.

But men were not content merely with speculations upon the nature of godhead, or with schemes for a universal religion ; that religion must provide them with

some clear promise of a glorious immortality. The longing for definite teaching and assurance about life beyond the grave permeated all classes of society and became increasingly urgent as time went on. The philosopher of Stoic persuasion might gravely doubt its possibility, and the Epicurean, with his cynical humour, might poke fun at so ridiculous an idea, but the majority of men felt what Plutarch so beautifully wrote to his wife on the death of their little daughter, that it is harder to disbelieve than to believe. Certain it is that their eschatological teaching was the chief reason for the popularity of the Eastern cults and familiarized men with the idea of a future life. St. Paul's preaching of Jesus and the resurrection seemed preposterous to his cultured audience in Athens, and the literary attacks upon Christianity, for at all events 150 years, poured scorn upon the belief in a resurrection and a life to come. But for some time before the 'Peace of the Church' (313 A.D.), the pagan world as a whole had accepted the idea, and the church's hope of immortality, so far from being an obstacle to acceptance, was one of the most eagerly received articles of her faith.

Such was the religious condition of the Empire at the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Though the sketch of the rival cults has been necessarily very short and given only in the barest outline, enough has been said to show how great was the interest in religion everywhere evinced, how keen was the rivalry between the various systems, how eagerly all of them were seeking to provide answers to the moral and spiritual questions of the day, and how astonishingly they were coming to agreement on the fundamental problems of God, the soul, and the world.

Christianity gained the victory in the end because of its utter freedom from the coarseness of Nature worship, its

appeal to humanity in the person of Christ and its power—tested repeatedly by persecution—to win men to holiness of life and to keep them steadfast in it. But let it not be forgotten that those pagan cults played their part in the victory of the Cross. Dimly, but earnestly, men were feeling after God, if haply they might find Him. Not only Seneca and the Stoics in the loftiness of their conceptions, but the strange rites of Cybele and the majestic splendour of Mithra's creed were leading men to that knowledge of the true God, and the way to union with Him, which was finally and fully revealed in the person of Christ, and ministered through the mystical body of believers, the Christian Church.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL EXPANSION UP TO 325 A.D.

The story of the growth of the Christian religion after Constantine had granted toleration to the church is best told in the life histories of men like Boniface, or Willibrord, and many another before and since their day, who set out from the established and openly recognized church of their own district to preach the gospel to the barbarians. Adventurous and often dangerous as their lives were, their missionary activity was in many ways wholly different from that of the apostles and their followers in the first three centuries. Their work has much closer affinity with that accomplished by Bishop Selwyn in New Zealand or Bishop Patteson in the South Sea islands during the nineteenth century, than with the tasks assigned to the earliest pioneers. Missionaries went forth from the fourth century onwards, with all the prestige of an official religion, and with the sanction and support of all civilized people. But the apostolic and sub-apostolic preachers were faced with opposition and persecution organized by authority, and with suspicion and mistrust, in all the cities of the Empire which they visited, and for long periods the church was compelled to work underground. The end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century is set

as the limit of our enquiry into the social and geographical expansion of the church, for the reason that, after that time, the story of the spread of the gospel has been similar in outline wherever the cross has been planted.

1. *SOCIAL EXPANSION*

When the church had become sufficiently prominent for it to be worthy of the attention of philosophers, the impression drawn from their writings is that it consisted almost entirely of slaves and the lower classes. Celsus,[1] in his *True word against Christians*, pours scorn upon the Christian religion partly because of the low birth and lack of education of its protagonists. 'They show,' he says, 'that it is only the simpletons, the ignoble, the senseless, slaves and women folk and children, whom they wish to persuade or can persuade.' And he goes on to say: 'We see them in our own houses, wool dressers, cobblers, and fullers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons, not daring to say a word in the presence of their masters, who are older and wiser. . . .' It was natural that the preaching of brotherhood and equality, and the obligation upon the strong and favoured to help the weak and less fortunate brethren, should particularly appeal to the vast slave population which often lived in utter degradation and misery; and it is almost certain that slaves and freedom formed the bulk of the Christian congregations, in Rome at all events, till nearly the close of the second century, if not longer. Those to whom St. Paul sent individual greetings in his letters, bear for the most part names common among the lower, rather than the upper classes; indeed the apologists seem to glory in the fact that few men of rank have joined the church. We are justified,

[1] See also chap. iv.

therefore, in accepting the common dictum of the time, that Christianity was the religion of slaves, as being in the main a true description of the social position of its earliest adherents.

Though this estimate is broadly true, there is evidence that it did penetrate slowly into the more cultured classes, and from time to time, even until the reign of Diocletian, it was necessary to purge the court of Christians.

Evidence in the New Testament is scanty, but there are allusions in the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of St. Paul which show that here and there some prominent citizens joined the company of believers. Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, 'having land, sold it and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.'[1] When later, Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey, they first visited Cyprus, where they were favourably received by Sergius Paulus, the proconsul. Sergius was converted by the miracle of blindness wrought upon Elymas the sorcerer by Paul.[2] At Thessalonica a multitude of devout Greeks and 'of the chief women not a few,'[3] joined themselves to Paul and Silas. Paul's preaching at Athens created so deep an impression that he was brought before the highest court of the city, the Areopagus, that he might expound his teaching more fully to the philosophers there assembled. Though most of them scoffed and dismissed him as a babbler, Dionysius, a member of the court, and therefore a man of high social position and prestige, 'clave unto him and believed.'[4] There is some difficulty in accepting this statement, since St. Paul himself says that the household of Stephanus was the first fruits of Achaia;[5] but even if, as has been suggested,

[1] Acts iv. 36, 37. [2] Acts xiii. 8-12. [3] Acts xvii. 4.
[4] Acts xvii. 34. [5] 1 Cor. xvi. 15.

Luke inserted the names Dionysius and Damaris on the basis of an oral tradition, it points to the probability that some few of his hearers in that court, who were all educated men, accepted his teaching and followed him.

It has already been said that in his letters, St. Paul's greetings to individuals are chiefly addressed to those of the freedmen and slave classes ; but there are indications that his converts included some few of the nobility, and of those who held high office in the State. To the Church in Corinth he writes, ' Behold your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called ; but God chose the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame them that are wise.' [1] Though this passage supports the contention of a Church of the lower rather than the upper classes, it is at least deducible from the form in which the apostle cast his statement, that members of the nobility were not wholly wanting. Among such may be noted Priscilla, who must have been a person of considerable importance. St. Paul mentions both her and her husband, whereas in general it would be sufficient to name the husband alone. Phoebe, who ' ministers to the church at Cenchreae,' [2] was also a prominent person, who was probably a woman of property and a patroness of the Church in that place, rather than an employee.

In the 220 years which separate the apostolic age from the Peace of the Church, the evidence is confused and to some extent unreliable. It is derived partly from writers who knew little of general conditions beyond their own province, and were sometimes content to accept tradition without full enquiry, and partly from partizans like Tertullian, whose exaggeration of language is sufficient proof

[1] 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. [2] Rom. xvi. 1.

of his inaccuracy. But it is clear that the Christians always numbered some cultured people among them; that as time went on and the intervals between organized persecutions grew longer, these numbers greatly increased; and that by the time of Diocletian's most systematic harrying of the church, a considerable proportion of the emperor's household were openly Christian. The following extracts from contemporary literature will illustrate the point:

(*a*) In his well-known letter to Trajan (*c.* 112 A.D.), Pliny, governor of Bithynia, writes thus of the Christians he found there: 'For it seemed to me a thing worthy of consideration, especially because of the number of those in danger. For many of every age, of every rank, of either sex even, are brought into danger and will be brought. The contagion of that superstition has penetrated not only cities, but also villages and the country districts.'[1] There can be no doubt that Pliny was accurately informed, for though nothing is heard of the life of that province from his time until after 325 A.D., Diocletian's persecution showed that Nicomedia was a semi-christian city. Constantinople was chosen by Constantine to be his new capital partly because it lay opposite that especially Christian province; and further, it is hardly likely that Nicaea would have been chosen as the meeting-place for bishops from all over the world had it not been situated in a district pre-eminently Christian. Pliny's reference to 'many of every rank' may unhesitatingly be taken to mean that this religion was spreading with alarming rapidity among the educated and cultured, no less than among the untutored classes in that part of Asia Minor.

[1] See also chap. iv.

(*b*) Valerian (253-260 A.D.), who is reckoned as the eighth persecutor, issued two rescripts against the Christians. The second is concerned entirely with the upper classes and members of the imperial household, and runs as follows: Senators and prominent men and Roman knights are to lose their position and moreover, to be stripped of their property; if they still persist in being Christians after their goods have been taken from them, they are to be beheaded. Matrons are to be deprived of their property and banished into exile. But members of Caesar's household are to have their goods confiscated and to be sent in chains 'by appointment,' to the estates of Caesar.'[1] This rescript is a most valuable piece of evidence. Unless the number of Christians against whom it is directed had been considerable, it would not have been worth the emperor's while to issue so carefully framed an order; it was so worded as to include all prominent citizens of both sexes who were known to be favourable to the Church; it directed penalties of such severity as would hardly have been necessary if only a few individuals here and there were likely to fall under its provisions. Further, there is an atmosphere of panic legislation about it. It was a principle of Roman law that men of rank and position ought to undergo less severe punishments than those inflicted upon the lower classes for the same offence, and here that principle is reversed. The death penalty had not been imposed in the first rescript which was directed against Christians in general and of no particular class; here, in the second, it is confined to the upper classes. Clearly it was his intention to root out the pestilent superstition from among the educated and influential; and such panic can only be

[1] Harnack, *Expan. Christianity*, vol. ii. pp. 189-190.

accounted for on the supposition that the number of Christians was very large. Again, when it is remembered that the church had only just passed through the most severe persecution yet experienced (that of Decius in 250), we are bound to conclude that Christianity was widespread in the upper classes, at all events in Rome and the West, in the middle of the third century.

(*c*) Cyprian, who was bishop of Carthage during the reigns of Decius and Valerian, wrote in strong terms of condemnation against those who had lapsed from the faith under stress of the times. He begins his treatise, *On the Lapsed*, by showing that the persecution which had fallen upon the church was the punishment of God for the worldly life of Christians. One passage especially, throws light upon the position of upper-class Christians in the civil life of the Empire. 'Numerous bishops,' he says, 'who ought to be an encouragement and example to others, despising their sacred calling, engaged themselves in secular vocations, and relinquished their chair, deserted their people, strayed away among foreign provinces, hunted the markets for mercantile profits. . . .'[1] Such men, capable of bearing rule in the secular life of the State, must have been well educated; thus 'numerous bishops' at that time in Africa belonged to the upper classes.

(*d*) One more illustration must suffice: The last, and in some respects, most fierce persecution was that instituted by Diocletian between 303 and 305 A.D. His wife

[1] Cyprian, *De Lapsis* (J. H. Newman's translation). 'Episcopi plurimi, divina procuratione contempta, procuratores rerum saecularium facti sunt.' Another reading gives *regum* for *rerum*. It is probably to be preferred, though it is certainly less usual. If *regum* is the original word the passage adds greater force to the contention that Christianity was widespread among the upper classes in Africa and was no bar even to the highest offices in the State.

and daughter were both Christians, and this alone would make it possible for many members of the Imperial household, who might previously have concealed their faith, to declare themselves openly. For eighteen years of his reign their presence, close to the emperor's person, was tolerated, if not encouraged. But the long peace was broken at last. Urged on in part by Galerius, who bitterly opposed the Christian faith, and in part by the fears of his own gloomy disposition, Diocletian consented to a fresh attack upon the Christians. His edicts were specially directed to the purging of the court of all who refused to acknowledge the gods or to offer the accustomed libation to the emperor's statue. No doubt he was influenced to some extent by the fact that twice within a fortnight his bedroom in the palace in Nicomedia was set on fire, and the crime was attributed to Christian servants in attendance. But even so, there is plenty of evidence to show that, not only in the palace, but through all the offices of state and even in the army (though less here) the number of Christians had greatly increased since the last serious attack upon them in the reign of Valerian.

'Christianity,' says Harnack,[1] 'never became a religion of the camp, and all representations of Christianity which suggest that it had diffused itself specially by means of soldiers, are to be eschewed.' Reasons for the failure of the church to win over the army are not hard to find. Mithraism, as a previous chapter has pointed out, was essentially the soldier's creed; it was in the army that Mithra made and retained most of his converts. The crucified Nazarene could not offer to the legionary the joy and light and warmth of Mithra, ally of the Sun. Further, the profession of arms seemed to many Christians,

[1] Harnack, *Expan. Christianity*, vol. ii. p. 204.

in the early days at least, inconsistent with their loyalty to Christ. The military oath was a stumbling-block to many recruits, and difficulties were bound to arise if bodies of troops, containing Christians, were called out to quell a riot which had arisen because of the presence or actions of Christians in a particular town or district.

Rigorists like Tertullian, held that the life of a soldier was incompatible with the claims his religion made upon him, and maintained that there was no alternative for a soldier, when converted, but to resign his position or offer himself for martyrdom. Yet even Tertullian, when it suits his purpose, points out—though again, with his customary rhetorical exaggeration—that Christians had filled ' the camp itself.' And it seems that the strictures of the rigorists had little effect, for the undoubted presence of Christians in the army, though their numbers were few, goes to show that they were able to satisfy their consciences and maintain a dual loyalty, to the claims of their earthly and heavenly emperors.

Martyrdoms in the army may seem to have been more numerous than among the civilian population ; but this proves nothing except that military life rendered Christians more likely to be discovered. At any moment they might be ordered to do some thing which in conscience they would feel bound to refuse ; a soldier lived his life in absolute publicity, in the closest proximity to his fellows ; his religious convictions could not long remain hid, and so he would be in continual danger from an evil-disposed companion, who might lay a charge against him out of spite.

Stories such as that of the Thundering, or Theban [1] legions, or the accounts of the martyrdom of individual soldiers, only show that there were Christians in the army :

[1] See chap. iv.

they are of no use in estimating what proportion of the imperial troops had accepted Christianity at a given moment. Had it been widespread it would assuredly have been known and, almost certainly, orders would have been issued to repress it ; but there is no evidence of such measures until the time of Diocletian, whose edicts definitely mention soldiers as well as members of the court. The most that can be said is that some soldiers at all events did not regard their religion as making impossible the fulfilment of their obligation to render military service ; that in certain cases their presence in the army and the practice of their religion was connived at by the authorities ; that as a rule no action was taken against them unless a definite charge was brought and conflict arose ; and finally, that at no time was Christianity a serious rival to Mithraism in the camp.

It is not possible, then, to form any estimate of the relative number of Christians in the different social grades or in military or civil walks of life. The majority of congregations were probably composed of the lower classes until about the middle of the third century. Our information before that time is scanty, as there are very few Christian writers whose works have survived, before about 250 A.D. Though it seems reasonable to account for this paucity of literary output on the grounds of the general lack of education among them, it would be unwise to lay too much stress upon it. There were other factors at work which must not be overlooked. Christians had been forbidden to commit their beliefs to writing lest their books should fall into the hands of the persecutor and be used for sacrilegious purposes ; thus literary work was much restricted. Further, in times of comparative peace, some apologetic work was undertaken, as witness Justin

Martyr in the time of Antoninus Pius ; and it would be a mistake to suppose that because the school of Alexandria only became famous under Clement and Origen, no men of learning had hitherto joined themselves to the Church of Christ. It was obviously far more difficult for men in high public position, with much to lose, and with an inherent dislike of Jewish or semi-Jewish influence, to accept openly the new cult. In the long and almost unbroken peace between Valerian and Diocletian, men of all ranks joined the church, and in those years Christianity grew in numbers and popular favour more rapidly than hitherto.

The balance of such evidence as there is inclines to the opinion that in general throughout the Empire, the church's appeal was successful first and pre-dominantly among the lower classes ; that there was always a sprinkling of learned men in the local churches ; and that finally, when Christianity triumphed, the great influx of learned people seems to show that there was a large body of educated men secretly in sympathy with the church, though they had lacked the courage to declare their opinion in dangerous days.

2. *GEOGRAPHICAL EXPANSION*

It is easier to describe the geographical expansion of Christianity than to estimate its influence upon the cultured classes, and to trace its penetration in different ranks of society. The story can be more quickly told because there is not much to tell in each district beyond the facts of who first worked there, and when the missionaries first set foot in the new province. Broadly speaking, the infant communities shared a common experience in their development : persecution was possibly more

severe in some places than in others ; the faithful were more, or less, courageous in different centres ; it was possible to profess Christianity openly in parts of the Empire, with little fear of punishment, at an earlier date perhaps, than in a neighbouring province. But when all these varying circumstances have been taken into account, the main lines of the narrative are the same everywhere. There is little reliable evidence as to the number of Christians in the towns and provinces in which churches were planted, before Constantine. It is possible to say, from internal evidence, that here, or there, the Christian community was unusually strong, or of no particular importance, but in every case the strength or weakness of the church seems to have depended upon the status rather than the number of its adherents. If people of wealth and influence became Christian (as in Edessa, where the royal family had embraced Christianity before 190 A.D.), the church in that place would naturally have greater weight than in a district where its members were drawn chiefly from the slave and lower classes. Again, as the apostolic missionaries and their successors regarded the whole world as the field of their operations, and refused to be daunted by danger or difficulty due to local circumstances, the time of the first preaching of the gospel in a town depended rather upon the chance that a missionary was available for that district and felt a special call to evangelize it, than upon any plan of campaign organized upon geographical lines. Yet, even when allowance has been made for a certain lack of method in world evangelization, it is worthy of note that the gospel had been carried to almost all centres of importance within the Empire, both East and West, in the first hundred years after Christ's ascension.

Starting from Jerusalem, the gospel spread fairly evenly over Asia Minor in the first century. The indefatigable labours of Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, is told in the Acts of the Apostles, and is presumably familiar to all readers of this book. In general his preaching was received with interest by Gentiles and rejected by Jews, and such opposition as he encountered was stirred up by Jews in the synagogues in which, in earlier days, he invariably first delivered his message. The work which he began in Asia was carried on by successors, some of them appointed by himself, so that Asia Minor has probably the oldest continuous Christian history.

St. Peter seems to have worked in Antioch ; in spite of the very strong tradition that he worked in Rome, there is no certain evidence that he visited the city ; he certainly cannot have founded the church there.[1] There is New Testament evidence for his presence in Antioch,[2] and the church in that place proudly claimed him as its founder. After Alexandria, Antioch was the greatest city of the East and ranked third in importance in the Empire, and the church there played a most important part in the doctrinal struggles of later centuries. Like Alexandria, it had a mixed population in which there were strong Jewish and Greek elements ; Greek was the common tongue of the Antiochenes, and Greek thought largely influenced the well to do and educated classes. It was here that the followers of Christ were first nicknamed ' Christians,' and that name, given perhaps in ridicule, or at least with humorous intent, was universally adopted before the close of the apostolic age. It was fitting that such a city should be the cradle of Gentile Christianity ; it was from Antioch that St. Paul was first commissioned to preach in Asia ;

[1] But see below, pp. 61-62, and chap. x. [2] Gal. ii. 11-14.

it was here that the battle for Gentile freedom from Judaizing restrictions was first fought out ; it was here in later days that a school of Christian speculative philosophy flourished, rivalling that of Alexandria ; it was here that the second of the six venerable patriarchates of the early church was established.

Ephesus received the gospel at the hands of St. Paul. 'With its oriental religion, its Greek culture, its Roman government and its world-wide commerce, it stood midway between two continents, being on the one hand the gateway of Asia to crowds of Western officials and travellers, as Bombay is the portal of India to-day, and on the other hand, the rendezvous of multitudes of Eastern pilgrims coming to worship at the shrine of Artemis. No wonder if it believed that what was said and done by its citizens was quickly heard and imitated by all Asia and the world.' [1] Its cosmopolitan character accounts for the readiness with which its citizens received the new teaching, and for their tolerance of St. Paul. After the uproar caused by the silversmiths had been quietened, full liberty of prophesying was granted to the apostles, so that Christianity enjoyed the position of a *religio licita* earlier in Ephesus than in any other part of the Empire. Later, of course, edicts of repression were enforced there as elsewhere, but in the beginning missionaries were free to come and go as they pleased.

It is impossible here, to discuss the vexed question of the connection of St. John the apostle with Ephesus ; there is a strong and very early tradition that he spent many years there and was buried there ; the veneration in which the patriarchal see of Ephesus was held in later years is largely due to this tradition. Jerome says of him :

[1] Hastings, *Dict. of Apos. Church*, 'Ephesus' (compressed).

'When, on the death of the tyrant, St. John returned from Patmos to Ephesus, he used to go away, when he was summoned to neighbouring districts as well, in some places to establish bishops, in others to organize whole churches, in others to ordain to the clergy those indicated by the Spirit.' Jerome is quoting a tradition established long before his own time, and even if in detail it is inaccurate, there is no inherent improbability in the story that St. John did spend some time there after St. Paul's departure, building up the church in the city and district.

The most interesting external witness to the rapid spread of the new faith in Asia Minor is Pliny's correspondence with the emperor Trajan, to which allusion has already been made. The point to be emphasized here is that he found many of every age and rank; that some of them confessed to having been Christians as long as twenty years previously; and that the old pagan altars were in danger of utter decay. Christianity reached Bithynia, therefore, not later than 90 A.D; it spread with amazing rapidity, and was a serious menace to the religious customs of the empire when Pliny sought advice from Trajan concerning the attitude he ought to adopt towards it.

There is no record of the coming of Christianity to Alexandria, or of the work and growth of the church in that place, until the time of Demetrius, who was bishop there from 183 to 231 A.D., and became the close friend of Clement, the famous head of the catechetical school. Here perhaps, more than anywhere else except Rome, would the story of the reception of the first missionaries be interesting and instructive. Though closely rivalled by Antioch, it was the largest commercial city of the East. Great ships from India or Spain rode at anchor in its

magnificent harbour, dominated by the glorious pile of the Serapeum. Its streets were thronged by a motley crowd of all nationalities, speaking every known tongue, turbulent to the point of savagery, tolerant, as it seems, of all opinions. Greek, Roman and Jew jostled each other for prominent places in the civil or religious life of the city, and few places indeed were so cosmopolitan in population and outlook as was the home of Isis and Serapis. Here the priests of Egypt and of Greece had sat down together, with the encouragement of the Ptolemies, to work out a harmony between their respective religions; here the Jews had published the Septuagint; here Philo had attempted to reconcile Jewish and Greek philosophy; here, later, was founded the Christian catechetical school which trained Clement and Origen, Athanasius and Cyril. And yet our ignorance of the early life of the church in this city above all others, is complete! How did it begin? Tradition, which Eusebius narrates, says that St. Mark carried the gospel thither; but there is no evidence in support of it, and Eusebius himself is careful to note that it is a tradition.

The city is never directly named in the New Testament, but there are four references to it in the Acts of the Apostles. Stephen incurred the wrath of the synagogue of the Alexandrians in Jerusalem by his preaching, and through their hostility was haled to martyrdom.[1] Apollos, the friend and fellow-worker of St. Paul, was an Alexandrian by race, a learned man, mighty in the Scriptures.[2] It was an Alexandrian ship upon which St. Paul was embarked as a prisoner to be sent to Rome, and which was wrecked on the island of Melita[3]; and finally, it was a 'ship of Alexandria' in which the journey to Puteoli

[1] Acts vi. 9. [2] Acts xviii. 24. [3] Acts xxvii. 6.

was accomplished, three months later.[1] Though these passages throw no clear light upon the beginning of Christian life there, they do suggest certain ways by which the faith may first have been brought. Two things are reasonably certain: first, that whether by apostolic labourers or not, so important a commercial city must have been visited, and perhaps frequently, by Christians in quite early days, and perhaps a Christian colony established; and secondly, that the flourishing condition of the church and of its catechetical school in the third century points to a fairly long history behind it, which would account for its undoubted influence throughout Egypt. It seems probable that from quite primitive times other Egyptian churches looked to Alexandria for authority and support; several local bishops attended a synod summoned by Demetrius in 231 A.D. to consider the disciplinary question which had arisen because of Origen's ordination at Caesarea. It came to be regarded as a metropolitan see exercising jurisdiction over all Egypt, and at length was raised to the dignity of a patriarchate.

However obscure may be the beginnings of Christian life in the heart of the great empire which bears her name, documentary evidence for its presence in Rome, both pagan and Christian, is more full and complete than for any other city or district. In spite of the very strong tradition to the contrary it seems impossible that St. Peter should have founded the church there. St. Paul's epistle to the Romans is dated between 56 and 58 A.D., and the tone of his opening address precludes the idea of apostolic foundation, apart from the fact that had St. Peter been there at the time, he must have been mentioned first among those to whom Paul sent greetings at the close

[1] Acts xxviii. 11.

of the letter. He writes with the authority of the apostle of the Gentiles, that being his chief claim to address the converts in that city. He would not have built upon another man's foundation, and least of all would he have claimed authority over a church founded by Peter himself.

It is practically certain that St. Peter visited Rome at a later date ; the tradition of his residence and martyrdom there is too strong to be rejected. As early as the genuine Clementine epistle (*c.* 95 A.D.) reference is made to the belief that both Peter and Paul suffered in a persecution in Rome ; and from that time onwards mention of their joint martyrdom is made by numerous writers. There need not therefore be much hesitancy in believing that the prince of the apostles did visit the city and laboured there, but it should be remembered at the same time that he was not the founder of the Roman church.

The evidence points to its foundation by unknown missionaries very early in the apostolic age. From the time of Pompey's conquest of Judaea in 63 B.C. there had been a flourishing colony of Jews in Rome, who, since they had a synagogue of their own in Jerusalem, the synagogue of the Libertines, evidently kept in close touch with the holy city and were constantly passing to and fro between Jerusalem and Rome. 'Strangers of Rome' were present on the day of Pentecost and witnessed the strange events of that day ; they might go back to Rome predisposed to receive the Christian message, so that, later, when missionaries arrived and began to teach, they possibly found some among their hearers who already knew something of the faith they were asked to accept, and were the more readily converted. Christianity grew rapidly, and was flourishing and well spoken of when St. Paul wrote his epistle, for he says, 'Your faith is spoken

of throughout the world'; and when he reached Rome as a prisoner, he wrote to his converts at Philippi, mentioning 'the church in Caesar's household.' By that time, therefore, we may conclude, it numbered adherents even in the imperial palace. There is pagan evidence for its rapid growth in the first age. Tacitus speaks of *ingens multitudo christianorum* in his account of the Neronian persecution, and Dio Cassius, in his story of Domitian's persecution at the end of the first century, speaks of many who were put to death on the charge of Atheism[1] and Judaizing, among whom were Flavia Domitilla, Domitian's niece, and Titus Flavius Clemens, his cousin and follow consul. Not many years later Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote a letter to the Roman church in preparation for his coming there—as he hoped—for martyrdom. He was afraid that the Christians were sufficiently influential to attempt to gain his release, and he implored them to take no steps to save him, 'for it is easy for you to do what you will.' As such opportunities to plead for the life of a prisoner could only be within the reach of the wealthier classes, it is clear that Ignatius believed that members of the upper classes had joined the church, and in sufficient numbers to make their presence felt by the civil authorities. A further point worthy of notice in his epistle to the Romans is the marked respect with which he addresses the church there. His point of view is best illustrated by Harnack, who says: 'However much we tone down the exaggerated expressions in his letter to the Romans, so much is made clear—that Ignatius assigns to the Roman community a position of real superiority over the sister communities . . . the effusiveness of the address shows that he values and salutes

[1] See chap. iv. for the charge of atheism.

this community as the foremost in all Christendom.'[1] A later chapter of this book deals with the rise of the papacy and the position of the Roman church in the first five centuries, and it will be more suitable to discuss the characteristics of the church throughout the period under review, in that place. Suffice it now to say that the faith was early planted there, that it was received with favour by men widely separated in the social scale, and that it was accorded a primacy, of honour at all events, as early as the sub-apostolic age.

In Italy as a whole Christianity made but slow progress. Evidence for its existence is scanty and of comparatively late date. There were probably about a hundred bishops about the middle of the third century, for Eusebius says that sixty Italian bishops attended a council summoned by Pope Cornelius in 251 A.D. Apparently the southern part of the peninsula accepted the new religion more readily than the northern, partly, no doubt, owing to the strong Greek influence there. As the faith advanced northwards the number of fresh converts was less, and records of church buildings and of congregations are more scanty until after the middle of the fourth century, when the work of Ambrose at Milan gave a fresh stimulus to evangelistic effort in upper Italy.

There are but few records of Christian foundations in the northern part of Gaul before the fourth century ; but Lyons and Vienne, the Rhone valley and Marseilles, have a continuous Christian history from about 170 A.D. How it reached the shores of southern Gaul is entirely unknown. There had been a Greek colony at Massilia from early times and constant intercourse had been maintained by merchants between the Levant and the coast towns of the

[1] Harnack, *History of Dogma*, i. p. 486.

western Mediterranean. One of the Roman roads, the *Via Aurelia*, skirting the north-west coast of Italy, passed through Genoa to *Forum Julii* and thence to Arles, up the Rhone valley, and so to Lyons. Christian sailors, manning a ship from Ephesus, or travellers on the Aurelian way probably brought the gospel to the Rhone valley ; but the church in that district was pre-dominantly Greek in outlook and held the traditions of St. John in especial reverence. This may have been because it was founded from that part of Asia Minor in which the apostle, by tradition, worked ; or because Irenaeus, who became bishop of Lyons in 177 A.D., was himself a native of Asia, and in early life had known Polycarp, the pupil of St. John and a famous bishop of Smyrna.

Though the church of southern Gaul gained a sudden and glorious notoriety during the persecution of 177 A.D. in which Pothinus, the predecessor of Irenaeus, and Blandina the slave girl, were the most notable martyrs, yet it must have been, in that district, a very small community, for only forty-nine people perished. It had little influence beyond its own borders until the fourth century ; but in later days it played a most important part in the liturgical life of the western church. Its rite, which was probably local in origin, modified and amplified the old rite of the city of Rome, and in its new form became the almost universal rite of western Christendom.

According to tradition, St. James was the first missionary to Spain, but there is no historical foundation for the story. It is possible that St. Paul reached its shores, though this also is only a matter of conjecture. He had expressed a desire to visit Spain in his letter to the Romans, and Clement of Rome says that ' he reached the

furthest bounds of the West,' by which was generally meant the western shores of the Mediterranean. Spain possessed a peculiar fascination for the Roman mind, and here, more than in many another colony was the 'Romanisation of a province' carried through. This would account for the apostle's eagerness to go there, for St. Paul had his full share of pride in the glory and immensity of that empire of which he was a citizen, free-born. But there is no certainty of his presence there, and except for passing references in Irenaeus and Tertullian, the first knowledge we have comes from Cyprian,[1] bishop of Carthage in 250 A.D. Spanish congregations had written to the church in Africa for advice in matters concerning the treatment of the lapsed,[2] and it appears from the reply of Cyprian and his synod that there was much need of a stiffening of discipline, and that the Spanish Christians were in danger of too easy a compromise with secularism.

The only other piece of evidence before Constantine, is the synod of Elvira, held in 306 A.D. Some forty representatives of local churches attended, and the canons which they drew up, and which were largely concerned with discipline and morals, fully bear out the conclusions drawn from Cyprian's letter, namely, that there was grave laxity of life and much compromise with pagan customs. It is perhaps worthy of note that no great name appears among Spanish Christians until that of Hosius, bishop of Cordova, who was a personal friend of Constantine and took the chair at the first council of Nicaea.

Alexandria and Egypt belong to the East, Carthage and Africa to the West; Carthage was essentially a Latin city as Alexandria was a Greek city. Rome and Carthage were knit together by close ties of commerce and trade,

[1] Cyprian, *Epistles*, No. 67.

[2] See below, chap. vi.

and the Christian communities in the two places maintained the same close intercourse. It may have been because in social and political life Carthage looked to Rome, that the Carthaginian Christians looked to their Roman brethren for guidance in times of difficulty. Tertullian speaks of Rome as the place 'whence we too derive our authority.' This may mean that Christianity reached Africa from Rome, or that the growing church in that district looked naturally to Rome for encouragement and advice, apart altogether from questions of its origin.

Some of the most illustrious names in early church history are connected with Africa: Tertullian, the fierce apologist at the end of the second century, who later lapsed to Montanism; Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who held a position hardly less honourable and important than that of the bishop of Rome, and who, indeed, repudiated with some heat the increasing claims of Rome to more than local authority; Augustine of Hippo, whose theology has influenced the western church as no other writer, either Eastern or Western, has done, and the outlines of whose life are still familiar and attractive, even to those who have no particular interest in the history of the church and its dogmas. These are but three of its illustrious sons. In its day perhaps the most flourishing of all provincial Christian communities, it is strange that its origin is entirely unknown, and that it perished almost completely before the advance of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The first allusion to it is the martyrdom of six persons at Scili in 180 A.D. under Commodus; few and insignificant they may have been, but a few years later there is ample evidence of an African church, flourishing and of amazing vigour. Its history at that time centres round that

strongly attractive though in some ways repellent figure, of Tertullian, the converted lawyer. Of his apologetic work something is said in the next chapter; here we must confine ourselves to his references to the geographical expansion of Christianity. If, as seems likely from the witness of Cyprian and the fierceness of the Decian persecution fifty years later, the gospel had spread with remarkable success throughout the province, Tertullian's exaggerated estimates of its world-wide expansion may be to some extent understood, and pardoned. He speaks of 'so many thousands of people, so many men and women, people of both sexes, of every age, of every rank'; or again, 'Such are our numbers amounting almost to a majority of the citizens in every city'; or once more, 'We have filled all the places you frequent, cities, lodging houses, villages, townships, markets, the camp itself, the tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate, the prison.' Obviously this is the language of exaggeration, and contemporary and later evidence makes it abundantly plain that Christianity was by no means so widely diffused as Tertullian's estimate might lead us to believe. But it may well be that in Africa in his day, the church did flourish, as nowhere else, so that his remarks, if strictly confined to that province, may be fairly accurate. At all events in Cyprian's time it had an importance, as has already been said, second only to that of Rome; and though Cyprian himself was a man of outstanding ability and of high social station, something more than the influence of one man is needed, to account for the position of the African church in the last half of the third century.

Latin as the language of the church was first used in Africa, and, while the Roman church was still a Greek community in thought and speech, Carthage was thinking

and writing and probably worshipping in the Latin tongue. The quick African temper, the leaning towards asceticism, and the gloomy, intolerant spirit of the Punic race, gave a character to the church there established unique in Christendom. Its history is too full to pursue here, but it possesses an attractiveness above all other churches of the early days, except that of Rome, and is worth far fuller treatment than we are able to give it in this book.

It is most disappointing to be told that evidence for the original preaching of the gospel in these islands is entirely lacking, yet such is the case. There are no early Christian inscriptions, whereas altars to Mithra, and other pagan relics, abound. The first clear witness is the fact that three British bishops attended the council of Arles in 314 A.D., their sees being London, York and Lincoln, though the identification of this last place is uncertain, the Latin title of the third bishop being *Colonia Londinensium*. Stories of the preaching of the apostle Paul, or of Joseph of Arimathaea, must be dismissed as not having a particle of evidence in their support ; indeed, the legend of Joseph and Glastonbury is found for the first time in William of Malmesbury, and there it is given as a common belief and not as a fact. It is very likely that the gospel was brought in trading vessels from southern Gaul to the coast of Ireland and Cornwall. There was a regular trade in tin between Cornwall and Phoenicia, and this may be the origin of the Arimathaean legend. Tertullian says that ' places of the Britons, inaccessible to the Romans are subject to Christ.' [1] This must not be taken too literally, but it is reasonable to infer that Christianity had reached Britain by this time, and that Tertullian knew about it.

The first notice of persecution is in connection with the

[1] Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 7.

martyrdom of Alban, narrated by Bede. Bede fixes the event as taking place during the reign of Diocletian in 303 A.D. There is some doubt about the accuracy of his story, though it was apparently well known on the continent a few years later than its reputed date, but there is no inherent improbability in the fact of martyrdoms in Britain about that time. Since, however, Christianity seems to have perished, or at all events to have survived only in the remote fastnesses of the Welsh mountains, during the Saxon invasions, we are led to the conclusion that it was weak, and never penetrated far, or gained a real foothold in these islands during the Roman occupation.

3. *GENERAL ESTIMATE AS TO EXPANSION UP TO 325 A.D.*

No estimate of the actual number of Christians in the Empire at the beginning of the fourth century would be accurate; our knowledge of the total population is not sufficient for us to work out the proportion of Christians to pagans. But though it is not possible to speak in terms of figures, some idea of the relative strength of the church in different areas can be gained from its internal history. It is proposed in what follows to give simply the results of the investigations made and of the documentary evidence rendered available by scholars of recent times.

The Christian religion seems to have been most firmly established and most widespread in Asia Minor at the end of the period under review. Bithynia, Pontus and parts of Phrygia probably numbered Christians as the majority of the whole population; whilst the city of Edessa, though it may have been an oasis in a pagan desert, was, according to Eusebius, entirely Christian.

Harnack suggests that by 300 A.D. all the Asiatic provinces had been mapped out, with a complete network of bishoprics, and that in some districts Christianity had become the official religion.

In Carthage and the neighbouring country, in Alexandria and Egypt, on the seaboard of Thessaly, Achaia, in Rome and the southern half of Italy, and in the Rhone valley, the Church was strong enough to hold her own against rival faiths and the persecutor. It numbered among its followers a fair proportion of the educated and well-to-do classes, though this is more particularly true in Rome and Africa, and of the later rather than the earlier years of our period.

Palestine, the interior of Greece, northern Italy, and the western part of Africa (Mauretania) either strongly resisted all efforts at Christianization (this was certainly true of Palestine), or only accepted the gospel towards the end of the third century. Thus these parts had little influence on the life of the Church in the earliest days ; whilst in upper Gaul, Germany, Britain, and the countries outside the boundaries of the Empire, such as Persia or India, our records are so scanty as to lead to the conclusion that at best Christianity was very weak, and probably hardly existed at all.

Thus there is a clear division : in the Greek-speaking part of the empire the Church grew and built up her life comparatively rapidly. This was natural, since the Greek world had been familiar with the teaching of the gospel continuously from the apostolic age. But of Latin Christianity there is practically no evidence before the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.). It was not, indeed, until Constantine moved his headquarters from Rome to Byzantium that the Latin church really became

vigorous, except in Africa. Undoubtedly the political rivalry between East and West reacted upon ecclesiastical politics, also, so that the Latin church became the church of the West and the Greek church the church of the East, in a sense far deeper and more significant than can be accounted for simply by the more or less accidental difference of tongue.

To the question whether Constantine's edict of toleration was the decisive factor in the final victory of the church, an unqualified Yes or No is insufficient. In large measure the victory had already been won, and won not by weight of numbers, not by popularity, or the influence of rich and important people, but by the inherent attractiveness of the message. In the consideration of the Oriental cults and their bearing upon the gospel, stress was laid upon the failure of them all to hold men in unswerving allegiance to their tenets. In the deepest and fullest sense, dominion over men's souls had been assured before 313 A.D. If practical proof be asked for, the external witness afforded by the rapid growth of Christianity between 250 and 325 A.D., rapid beyond all comparison with the growth of earlier days, may suffice. In those years, be it remembered, it was still a *religio illicita*, and its profession was punishable by deprivation of goods or civil rights, and by death itself upon a third conviction. From this point of view there would have been an edict of toleration sooner or later in any case. Constantine was animated, not by Christian zeal, but by the desire to secure peace within his dominions, and he had sufficient wisdom to see that it was more profitable to placate than to offend so large a body of his subjects, who in all but their religion were doubtless as good citizens as their pagan neighbours. In this sense, then, the last seventy

years before 313 A.D. were decisive rather than the edict, for it was in that period that thoughtful people realized that the growth of Christianity could not be checked, still less abolished, in the Empire.

But the edict was decisive in this way, that it finally liberated the church from the hampering effects and the fear of official opposition. It enabled that expansion, which we have traced through the dangerous days, to continue, no longer in secret, or with the grudging connivance of individual provincial governors, but in the full light of day, with all the influence of the Emperor's support behind it. As was said at the beginning of this chapter, it enabled the missionaries to prosecute their work of world evangelization without fear of what repressive action might be taken against the communities at home. Thus it is that the accession of Constantine is the most convenient point at which to bring to a close the consideration of the early social and geographical expansion of Christianity.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERSECUTIONS

It was no easy path to world-wide dominion which Christ had promised His followers, 'Ye shall be hated of all men for My Name's sake,'[1] He had told them; and He had warned them against a false sense of security or success when their message was too readily received, and they themselves popular: 'Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.'[2] The Christian society was to go out into the world expecting opposition: it is not therefore surprising to find, when persecution raged, that some bishops, especially in Africa, had to restrain their flocks from needless and wanton offering of themselves for martyrdom.

1. *ACTIVE OPPOSITION*

Tertullian, the first great Christian writer in Latin, a native of Carthage, in which city he spent the greater part of his life (*c.* 150-220 A.D.), says in a magnificent passage in defence of Christianity, 'The blood of Christians is seed.' It was by their blood alone that most Christians could bear witness to the sincerity of their belief, at least in the early days. Few cultured or wealthy people, and

[1] St. Matthew, x. 22. [2] St. Luke, vi. 26.

fewer still among the philosophers had as yet joined the sect of the Nazarene, and so that stream of literary defence known as the Apologies had not yet begun. The apologist endeavoured to convince opponents by reason ; the martyr could only hope to win men to Christ by his courage in the face of death.

From Nero to Constantine (64-313 A.D.) the Church was never free from the danger of persecution. It is true that there were periods of peace, longer or shorter according to the lenity of provincial governors, or the external dangers surrounding the Empire. But at any time the cry might be raised : *Christianos ad leones*, and seldom indeed was Christian blood not shed in the place where such a cry was raised.

The very act of opposition was unique in the Empire. No other religion was persecuted unless it was found to be frankly immoral. Probably at no time till within living memory,[1] was there such complete freedom of opinion in religious matters as existed in the early days of the Empire. And this was inevitable from the nature of the Empire itself. It embraced men of every colour and class, and spread from the Danube to the Sahara, from Britain to the Euphrates and beyond. It bound in a common loyalty the stalwart German, the pleasure-loving Greek, the hot-blooded African, the Phrygian with his strange and magical cults. Only on a basis of mutual toleration in those things which most profoundly stir the hearts of men, could the Imperial Government hope to retain its far-flung conquests.

To this rule of universal tolerance no exception was made in the case of Christianity, in its infancy. Every-

[1] The abolition of religious tests in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, 1871.

where, as he travelled through the Eastern Empire, St. Paul found protection from mob violence in the Roman Government, and could urge in letters to his converts the duty of submission to temporal rulers as being the representatives of God.[1] But this official protection—which was actually no more than Rome's normal practice of seeing fair play between disputants—did not last long. The fury which burst upon the church in Rome in 64 A.D. argues an hostility deeper and more widespread than can be accounted for simply on the suggested grounds that Nero was plotting against Christians to hide his own guilt in the burning of Rome.

Nero comes down to posterity as the embodiment of all that was most debased in the social life of Rome at that time. Vicious, luxurious, a frequenter of taverns, or, as we should say to-day, of low music halls, he was, at the same time, despised by the aristocracy and the idol of the mob. Stories of almost incredible escapades were current about him ; but even the mob grew restless when it was rumoured that the great fire which devastated Rome in July, 64 A.D., had been planned by the Emperor himself, and that during the conflagration he had amused himself by singing to his lyre the burning of ancient Troy. The rumour could hardly be true, but, ' to divert suspicion from himself,' says Tacitus,[2] ' he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were already branded with deserved infamy.' Some were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and dogs were set upon them ; others were crucified. But not content with this, or perhaps thoroughly to discredit the rumour, Nero gave a garden party in the grounds of the Imperial palace. The party lasted

[1] Romans, xiii. 1. [2] Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44.

till far into the night and, as daylight waned, a new form of illumination was used : Christians smeared with pitch and stretched on poles were set on fire, and their burning bodies lit up the course of the chariot races. Presently the Emperor himself appeared in marvellous costume, driving his own chariot through a lane of living, burning, men and women, amid the thunderous applause of his guests. By the weird gruesomeness of the scene with its more than barbaric splendour, Nero succeeded in fastening the guilt upon the Christians, and though their sufferings wrung pity from those who witnessed that scene of horror, the custom of Christian-baiting was begun which was to last for nigh three hundred years.

If the whole period of persecution be taken in review, four reasons for this hatred continually recur.

(1) At least in the beginning the Christians were confused with the Jews, who were always most unpopular because of their haughty exclusiveness and their successful methods of business. Even when it became clear that they were not simply a Jewish sect, the fact that their Founder was a Jew who had been put to death by the Roman governor in Palestine, gave the whole movement a Jewish, traitorous and ' low-born ' atmosphere.

(2) The intolerance and exclusiveness of Christians was perhaps inevitable. The trustees of so tremendous a gospel could not keep silence in face of the prevailing vice, nor could they share the mysteries of their religion with all who came to enquire. So they were disliked as being, like the Jews, a people professing religious and moral superiority, and supposedly reserving it for themselves.

(3) Their influence upon social and commercial life was at least disquieting. The Ephesian silversmiths realized

the danger when, by the mouth of Demetrius,[1] they declared that ' This our craft is in danger to be set at nought.' The fortune tellers, the traffickers in prostitution, no less than those who pursued the legitimate trade of image carving, found that the hope of their gains was lost. Nor was this all : from time to time a home was broken up because wife or son had joined this accursed sect. It was no wonder that the mob turned with savage fury upon the disturbers of domestic peace.

(4) Finally, the common cry raised against them was that they were atheists. They had no idols ; they despised the gods of ancient Rome ; they worshipped a man, Jesus, a common malefactor ; they had not even the decent excuse of an ancient belief, the whole thing had happened in living memory ; they practised shameful rites in their secret meetings, even cannibalism. Suitable food were they, in very truth, for the beasts in the arena !

Such accusations might be sufficient to provoke a riot or to create a general feeling of hostility, but no Government could take official cognizance of the first two of these charges. It had to be demonstrable that in the prosecution of their religion the Christians were deliberately fomenting unrest against the civil authority or upsetting the social life of the Empire, before action could be taken against them.

(1) It was the charge of Atheism which gave the Government its opportunity. The fundamental principle of all the religions of antiquity was nationalism. Man had duties to Divinity in whatsoever form or place the divine power might manifest itself ; but he was especially bound to pay reverence to those deities associated in particular with his own city or tribe or nation. Thus, as the Empire

[1] Acts, xix. 27.

tolerated all religions, so must each religion tolerate all others ; to this rule the Jews alone were excepted. There is a long history behind the reasons for this exception, and in any case the Jews outside Palestine were usually law-abiding ; they outwardly respected—or did not interfere with—other folks' religion, and they could claim an ancient and national belief. Not so the Christians : though like the Jews they were monotheists, they were fundamentally distinct from them in that they were universalists and felt bound to declare openly and somewhat aggressively that the gods of the State were no gods at all, that men worshipped them in ignorance, and that the one true God had revealed Himself in the person of Christ, who claimed unquestioning obedience from all men. Thus they were Atheists in that they denied the existence of all gods except their own.

(2) Had they been content to be exclusive all might have been well ; but their demand for the universal acceptance of Jesus cut across the Emperor worship of the day. Perhaps no part of the religious revival of Augustus was so successful as the steps by which he invested the Emperor with God-like attributes and caused divine honours to be paid to his person. The refusal of Christians to burn incense to his statue, or to make the accustomed oblation of wine, was a positive menace. In vain they might protest that they prayed for the Emperor, as for all men, and rendered him the loyal obedience of all good citizens : plainly they were setting up a rival emperor, to whom divine honours must be paid. They were guilty of high treason.

(3) This suspicion of treason was strengthened by the difficulty some Christians found in performing military service. The form of the oath of allegiance to the Emperor,

which was administered to each recruit, seemed to some Christians to be idolatrous and disloyal to Christ, and they felt bound to refuse a duty incumbent upon all citizens. The story of the Theban Legion, however exaggerated it may be in detail, illustrates the difficulty and yet shows that many Christians were not disturbed by the necessity of taking the oath. But the refusal or withdrawal even of a few would be sufficient to bring the whole body under suspicion, especially as there were other counts to support the charge. The Theban Legion is said to have contained 6,600 Christians and was summoned from the East for service in Gaul by the Emperor Maximin (235-238 A.D.). As they drew near to the town of Agaunum, in the Swiss Alps, they discovered that they were to take part in a persecution against the Christians in the town. This they stoutly refused to do, and twice were decimated by their heathen fellow soldiers acting under the Emperor's orders. Then the leader of the survivors, Maurice by name (the modern town S. Moritz is named after him), declared to Maximin that he and his comrades were prepared to serve and obey him in all things which were consistent with their duty to God, but their duty to God was greater than loyalty to the Emperor, and nothing would force them to violate it. Maximin, enraged by their obstinacy, ordered troops to surround them and Maurice and his companions thereupon laid down their arms and quietly submitted to death.

(4) Yet again, they infringed the law of Julius Caesar as to clubs. The Government always viewed any association of its subjects, even for the most harmless and obviously profitable purposes, with the utmost alarm and suspicion. Trajan, for example, refused to incorporate a company of 150 firemen for the city of Nicomedia, so gravely did

he distrust any corporations within the State. Naturally, therefore, Christian meetings for prayer and worship in private houses, or in the Catacombs in Rome, laid them open at once to the charge of being law-breakers. And, because of the secrecy of their meetings, and because they were held at night, they were accused of committing the most abominable crimes.

The methods adopted by the Government to repress this dangerous religion were strangely unlike the normal judicial procedure. A trial for treason could have been instituted under any one of these four counts, for each of the charges given above might be construed as treasonable action. But strange though it may seem, the name of Christian alone was sufficient for persecution. *Nullum criminis nomen extat, nisi nominis crimen est*, says Tertullian [1]— 'No charge is even mentioned, the only charge is the name.' Pliny's correspondence with the Emperor Trajan (98-116 A.D.) is an interesting example of how puzzled some of the provincial governors were in their attempts to deal with Christianity.

Trajan had entrusted Pliny with a special mission to set in order the cities of Bithynia, which were in serious financial straits and reported to be most disorderly because of the number of clubs which had been found in them. Apparently he found an unusually large number of Christians in his province, and not having had occasion hitherto to deal with them, he wrote to Trajan [2] explaining what action he had taken and asking for advice. At first he had sentenced to death all who declared themselves Christians because they had disobeyed his edict about

[1] *Ad Nationes*, i. 5.

[2] Pliny, Ep. x, 96, 97. (The translation of the passages quoted is that of Prof. Gwatkin in his *Selections from Early Christian Writers*).

clubs. But finding them a far larger body than he had supposed, he carefully investigated the charges laid against them, and says in his letter : ' I discovered nothing else than a wicked and arrogant superstition ; I therefore adjourned the case and hastened to consult you.' Trajan in his reply says : ' Nothing can be laid down as a general law involving something like a definite rule of action.' They must not be hunted down, but if accused and convicted, punishment must follow ; further, if they recant they are to be pardoned. Clearly, from this answer, Trajan was as puzzled as Pliny. If to be a Christian was a punishable offence, the Government was failing in its duty if it did not hunt out the offenders. Again, no mercy was ever allowed to criminals guilty of such offences as those of which Christians were popularly accused. Tertullian seems to be right when he says that the name alone was the primary cause of persecution.

Early church historians reckoned the number of persecutions as ten, perhaps to correspond with the ten plagues of Egypt. It is hardly an accurate estimate, because often there were isolated outbreaks of ferocity such as that which occurred at Smyrna in 155 A.D. when Polycarp was martyred, or at Lyons and Vienne in 177 A.D. when the slave girl Blandina and the boy Ponticus, among others, suffered for Christ. Polycarp, who was bishop of Smyrna and was martyred there in 155 A.D., is the last known pupil of St. John. A Christian, Quintus by name, had come to Smyrna from Phrygia and probably by some act of fanatical zeal had incurred the wrath of the governor, who ordered him and eleven other Christians to be imprisoned. It was decided that these twelve prisoners should form part of the spectacle at the forthcoming annual games. Quintus recanted, but the eleven others endured bravely till death

released them, and then the mob, not yet satiated, cried out for ' Polycarp, the father of the Christians.' Polycarp, acting upon the advice of his friends, had retired to a farm outside the city, but was arrested and brought to the games on the next day, riding upon an ass. Howls of execration greeted him as he appeared, but the proconsul, moved to pity if not to reverence by the venerable aspect of the old man and his quiet dignity, sought to release him. ' Swear by the genius of Caesar and say, " Away with the atheists " and I will release you.' Polycarp, looking first with grave eyes upon the crowd and then up to Heaven, said, ' Away with the atheists.' ' But,' said the proconsul, ' Swear by the genius of Caesar and revile Christ.' Then came that memorable answer : ' Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has never done me wrong ; how then can I blaspheme Him now, my King, who saved me ? ' The games were by this time over for the day, so the demand *ad leones* could not be granted. But the mob, in a frenzy, seized faggots and piled them round the bishop who stood still, calmly awaiting his end. By a trick of the wind the flames made an arch over his head and the executioner, seeing that he was not burning fast enough, thrust him through with a sword. There were certain Jews present watching the scene, and when they saw the manner of his death they requested that the body might remain and be burnt to ashes lest the Christians should take it away for burial. But in spite of the precaution some of his disciples came to the smouldering pyre some hours later, and took up the bones, which the contemporary account says were ' more precious than gold,' and buried them.

Persecutions such as this, and others like it, were not part of the regular policy of the Emperor of the day, and if they were added to the ten, would make a far larger total.

And though ten Emperors were designated as being persecutors, only three of them instituted a systematic method of repression. Maximin (235-238) singled out the clergy especially, hoping thereby to make the practice of religion impossible. Decius (249-251) issued an edict ordering all Christians to appear before the governors of their respective cities on a certain day and to offer sacrifice or burn incense to the Emperor's statue and blaspheme Christ.[1] Diocletian (284-305) issued altogether six edicts of increasing severity, setting out the methods of attack to be adopted and the punishments to be incurred, ranging from deprivation of civil rights to slavery or death for obstinacy.[2] Apart, however, from these exceptions mob violence, encouraged or connived at by those in authority, seems to have been the usual method of persecution.

It is not easy to estimate the amount of persecution which Christians were called upon to endure before Constantine's edict of toleration. In one sense it might be maintained that the persecutions cover all the relations between Church and State, from the days of the first martyr, Stephen, to the last official attack upon Christianity in the reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363 A.D.). But for practical purposes the phrase 'The Persecutions' has a narrower sense, and is limited to those outbreaks of mob violence, and formal edicts issued by Emperors, which, with the exception of Julian, were brought to a close by Constantine's victory over Maxentius, at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, in 312 A.D. It is to this narrower sense that we will confine ourselves now.

Fifth century historians reckoned ten to be the number of official persecutions, as has already been said, though one of them calculated them to be seven. Neither number

[1] See fully, chap. vi. 'Novatianism.' [2] *Ibid.* 'Donatism.'

is satisfactory, because, while there were certainly less than ten official attacks, the number of sporadic outbreaks against the Christians were probably many more, and have never been recorded. It is a mistake to think that the church was fighting unceasingly, with her back to the wall, for the first three hundred years of her life ; and yet it must be remembered that, through all that time, the profession of Christianity was dangerous, and the intervals of comparative peace uncertain and precarious.

Those first three centuries may be divided into two nearly equal periods. The first begins with Nero in 64 A.D., and ends with the last Antonine emperor, Commodus, in 192 A.D. During this period it is generally true that official persecution was undertaken out of a desire to prevent disorder arising from mob violence, and to suppress Christian meetings, because they were suspected of being used for treasonable purposes. That is to say, Christianity was persecuted, not so much for its own sake —though that was true, apparently in the lifetime of Tertullian—as for its supposedly anti-social, anti-imperial aims.

The second period, from Septimius Severus (193 A.D.) to Galerius (311 A.D.) is on the whole marked by a steady decrease in hostility. The Syrian Emperors, Septimius Severus to Philip the Arabian (249 A.D.), were interested in the Eastern cults, and were tolerant towards Christianity as they were to all religions ; it was believed that Philip was a Christian, but there is no direct evidence to support it. Maximinus (235-238 A.D.) endeavoured to stamp out the sect of the Nazarene ; but that was an isolated incident in a period of comparative peace, during which the number of Christians increased enormously.

Decius, who succeeded Philip, and was the first of the

Illyrian Emperors, looked back to the days of Augustus, and the simplicity of the old native religion of Rome, and hated Christianity because of its 'atheism.' He set on foot one of the most fierce of all the persecutions,—it will be dealt with in Chapter VI.—but the threat of the Goth on the Danube frontier turned attention from internal troubles to danger from without, and once again the church entered upon a time of peace. This continued, with very little interruption, until Diocletian began his attempt to extirpate Christianity from the Empire. His first edict was published in 303 A.D., and though he died in 305, the persecution which he set on foot did not end till the death of Galerius in 311 A.D.

Thus it will be seen that if persecution was severe, there was a considerable amount of tacit toleration, and, through long periods, Christian life was able to develop and expand without serious interruption ; the picture of church organization in Carthage in the time of St. Cyprian is sufficient evidence for this. And yet it is likely that Christians suffered from mob violence from time to time in almost every place of any size within the Empire ; there are records of such outbreaks in districts so widely separated as the Rhone valley, Bithynia, Africa, and Sicily. Twice only were general edicts issued applying to the whole Empire ; it might well be that, while the church in one province, under a strict proconsul, was suffering hardship, in another district, where the governor was lax, or perhaps inclined to favour the new religion, Christians could profess their faith openly, with little danger of hostile action.

The effect of these three hundred years of attempted suppression—whether open or not—was almost wholly good. It knit the Christians together in a close friendship, the

bonds of which were strengthened rather than weakened by successive attacks. If there was a danger lest Christianity should follow the prevailing fashion of all religions, and come to terms with some rival cult, Isis or Mithra, such danger was averted by the fact that it remained a *religio illicita* long after the Eastern cults had won their way to favour. Thus the purity and integrity of the Gospel was preserved; and when the church was able to take her place as the official religion of the Empire, she offered to men the faith of Christ unalloyed by contact with the mystery cults, which for so long had striven with her for mastery over men's lives. And finally, hampering though the political restrictions were to her expansion, she was able to build up an organization and to perfect a system of discipline and government, so that, when the pagans flocked to her doors, seeking admission, in the fourth century, she was ready to receive them, without violent interruption of her life or alteration of her essential characteristics.

2. *LITERARY OPPOSITION AND THE APOLOGISTS*

As long as the Christian society was chiefly composed of freedmen and slaves and the more ignorant, it was deemed unworthy of the serious attention of philosophers and the learned. But in the second century it began to attract to itself as converts men like Aristeides, a philosopher from Athens, and Justin Martyr, also a pagan philosopher, who was converted to Christianity in middle life by a mysterious old man and was destined to suffer for his faith in 165 A.D. under Marcus Aurelius. Justin is especially famous. He wrote two Apologies for Christianity, one addressed to the Emperor, Antoninus Pius, and his family, and one to the Roman senate. Not

content to defend his fellow Christians with his pen, he used to go about speaking and debating in public places, endeavouring to show the intellectual reasonableness of this new faith.

If persecution by the sword failed to silence these obnoxious people, perhaps persecution by the pen might succeed ; so it is in the later years of the second century that the best known literary attack upon Christianity was published—the *True Word against Christians*.

Celsus, its author, is entirely unknown ; indeed, even his book is lost, and though it was probably written and in circulation in the later years of Marcus Aurelius (164-180 A.D.), it seems to have made little impression upon the Christian writers of the day, for they never allude to it. Had it not happened to fall into the hands of Origen about 249 A.D., it is quite probable that the world would never have heard of it. But Origen answered it point by point so closely that we are largely able to reconstruct the argument.

Now Celsus [1] was no mean adversary : he had taken the trouble to read such Christian books as he could lay hold of and he privately regarded them as folly. He states that in effect Christians say : ' Let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible : for all that kind of thing we account evil. But if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool, let him come boldly.' Such people show that it is only the simpletons, the ignoble, the senseless, slaves and womenfolk and children whom they wish to persuade and can persuade. They are like quacks who warn men against the doctor : ' Take care that none of you touches

[1] For the following extracts I have drawn entirely upon T. R. Glover's *Conflict of Religions*, etc., compressing his quotations to some extent.

science (ἐπιστήμη). Science is a bad thing: knowledge (γνῶσις) makes men fall from health of soul.' They keep on saying: 'Do not examine, only believe and thy faith shall save thee.' He says they are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nests, or frogs holding a symposium round a swamp, or worms in a meeting-house or assembly, in a corner of the mud, debating which of them is the more sinful. This was perhaps rather cheap abuse, and the work of Christian apologists in the Gnostic controversy [1] is sufficient refutation of such attacks. But Celsus is on more serious ground when he attacks the Christians' fundamental conception of God, which, with its insistence upon the Incarnation of Christ, he regards as altogether anthropocentric and contrary to reason. Like the Gnostics, Celsus abhorred the idea of a union between God and matter such as is expressed in St. John's words, 'The Word was made Flesh.' God cannot change to a mortal body, he says, and having, as he believed, proved his contention, he proceeded to present the Christians with a dilemma: 'either God really changes into a mortal body—and it has been shown that this is impossible—or He Himself does not change but He makes those who see, suppose so and thus deceives and cheats them.' Christ was a charlatan who went to Egypt, and there learnt some of the art of the Egyptian magicians which He used in performing His miracles.

Space is too limited to give more than these few extracts from his book. They are selected just to show something of his general line of thought on the purely religious side. But there was more than the question of religious belief in his mind. The reign of Marcus Aurelius closed in gloom; the future was full of foreboding. Barbarian

[1] See below, chap. vii.

hordes were threatening the Northern and Eastern frontiers ; Rome had been scourged by a great plague ; the very existence of the State seemed to be in danger. Like most of the thinkers of the day Celsus saw the urgent need of unity within the Empire. The political isolation of Christians was a serious menace to that unity. Even if they were not traitors in holding aloof, they were at least failing in their obvious duty to the State. So he ends his attacks with that famous appeal to them to abandon their isolation and respond to the call of their country in her hour of need. ' Come,' he says, ' to the help of the Emperor with all your might, and labour with him as right requires ; fight on his behalf and take the field with him if he call on you and share the command of the legions with him ; yes and be magistrates if need be, and do this for the salvation of laws and religion.'

The general line of literary attack can be summarized under three heads : against Christ : against Christianity : against Christians. The accusations laid against Christ were that He was of illegitimate birth and lived as an ignorant peasant amid ignorant country people ; that He was engaged in some treasonable conspiracy against Rome and suffered a well-merited and ignominious death. This attitude was not maintained, however, for the Neo-Platonists looked upon Him as a distinguished moral teacher though they rejected His claim to be God.

Two most useful weapons of attack against Christianity were its novelty and its barbarous origin. The respect which was felt to be due to an ancient religion has already been noticed ; so when it is remembered that Christianity was obviously a new religion, and, further, prided itself on having no national basis, it will readily be understood how bitter would be the attacks upon it. But the theory

of the resurrection of the body was perhaps the most difficult article of faith to believe. The philosophers regarded it as incredible folly. St. Paul had attempted,[1] not very successfully, to meet this line of argument, at Athens ; and the belief was continually brought forward as a subject for ridicule and abuse in the succeeding centuries.

And as to Christians ; the philosophers repeated the popular cry that they were atheists : that they lacked any culture, for their churches, they said, were filled only with runaway slaves or petty tradesmen and silly women. Their faith was gloomy and superstitious, and so they themselves, like the Puritans of a later age, refused to share in the common joys of everyday life. Finally, they declared, that by refusing to serve in the army, they failed in the first duty of a patriotic citizen and were traitors to the Emperor and the Roman State.

The witness of a blameless life was not in itself sufficient answer to charges such as these. Its innate attractiveness, with its emphasis upon brotherly love, purity of life and the hope of immortality might win to Christianity the outcast, the depressed, or those seeking the highest and purest ideal. If, however, it was to conquer the world it must declare not only that it was not opposed to reason and education, but rather that it contained within itself the most reasonable answer to all the problems which vex the minds of men. So the Apologists attempted not only to answer the pagan charges, but to show how inadequate were the current philosophies of religion in building up a constructive argument for the faith which they professed.

The methods they adopted differed widely according to their previous training and outlook. Men like Justin

[1] Acts, xvii. 18 *seq.*

Martyr or Clement of Alexandria or Origen, all of whom had been brought up in a Greek atmosphere (the two former had been converted from Paganism in middle life) treat heathenism with respect. Their general line is to argue from the philosophy of history. Taking up the idea in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'God Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets,' they endeavoured to show that God was slowly revealing Himself to the world in all the religious beliefs of the ancients. Thus Socrates, Plato, the Stoics were, unconsciously but none the less actually, God's instruments in the long period of preparation necessary to prepare the world for the final revelation. Then, as St. Paul declared in his great utterance to the Galatians, when the fullness of the time was come, the Gentile world, trained in philosophy, was able to receive the full and final revelation of God in the person of Christ, Who is the Logos, the Word or Wisdom of God.

This was perhaps the most profitable, as it was certainly the most reasonable, line to adopt. The other method, of which Tertullian [1] is the main exponent, and which is the more spectacular, was an attempt to prove that the Gospel revelation is the sole truth and all else is error. Tertullian, himself a lawyer and a rhetorician, an African with a biting tongue and vindictive temper, declared that heathenism was of the devil, that the philosophers were his dupes: that they had made terms with polytheism, animal worship, images, and all that was worst and most false in Paganism. He, pre-eminently among the Apologists, held up to ridicule and showed how unworthy of credence were the popular stories of the gods: 'Ask the

[1] See Glover, *op. cit.* chap. x.

spiders what they think of your gods,' he says, 'and their webs tell you. To-day a god, to-morrow a pan, as domestic necessity melts and casts the metal.'

Polemics such as these may be successful for the moment: Tertullian's attacks are sometimes so slashing, so bitter, that they leave the impression that his opponents must have been stunned by his blows. But success of this sort is transitory: the Apologists were far more effective when they endeavourd to build up a constructive line of defence. In the 'dog days' of persecution, as Tertullian calls them, it was natural that their chief care should be to rebut the foul charges made against them. But when quieter times dawned and the intervals between persecutions grew longer, the Christian teachers, more particularly in Alexandria, set to work and gave to the world a reasoned faith. They showed how reasonable were the progressive speculations of the Greek thinkers of a bygone age; they illustrated from the Old Testament scriptures the historical continuity of revelation, in that the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the life of Christ narrated in the New Testament. But most of all, they showed that the Christian religion was able to satisfy the deepest longings of every human heart as no other system of faith or morality could do. Platonism could appeal to the educated alone; daemon worship was scoffed at by all but the ignorant and superstitious; the cult of Osiris frankly pandered to the more degrading elements in human nature; even Mithraism, close rival as it was to Christianity for many generations, was unable finally to answer men's questions and supply their needs. But the religion of Christ could embrace in a common hope and mutual amity the patrician and the slave, the outcast and the mighty, the sinner and the saint.

It was on lines of thought such as these that Christianity won its right to be heard, to be respected, and finally to be accepted as the official religion of the Empire. Though the church owed a debt, quite incalculable, to the constancy of those brave men and women who could face the beasts in the arena, and smile at the howling mob watching for the bloody contest which could end only in death, in a form too terrible to contemplate, she is indebted in no less degree to those quiet men of learning and understanding, who by voice and pen showed the world the reasonableness and the inexhaustible depths of the religion of the crucified Nazarene.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTIAN LIFE

THE aim of the previous chapters has been to give in general outline a picture of the world to which the Christian missionaries went forth, bearing their new message of salvation ; to trace the growth of the Church in the Roman Empire in the first three centuries ; and to show what opposition she had to face before Constantine's edict of toleration in 313 A.D. Hitherto we have been content to speak in general terms of ' Christianity,' or ' the Church,' with no attempt to describe or define the words. But it is now time to direct our attention to the inner life of this society whose prophets and teachers turned the world upside down by their preaching, whose adherents seemed to be endowed with more than human courage as they faced martyrdom in the arena, and whose method of life, in its simplicity and brotherliness, contrasted so sharply with the everyday life of their pagan neighbours. It will be our business in the following chapters to consider the Christian system of life, its worship, discipline, and social activities ; to see how the steady development of organization and central authority led to reactions in favour of greater liberty on the one hand, or to a demand for yet stricter rigidity on the other. Then we must pass on to examine the effect of current pagan religious thought

upon the doctrinal development of the church, and the work of the two most famous schools of speculative philosophy within the Christian body, at Antioch and Alexandria ; and finally it will be our task to follow the history of those momentous years between 319 and 451 A.D., when Christian thinkers were evolving those formal statements of belief about the person of Christ which ever since have been the test of orthodoxy.

Whenever the apostles, in the course of their missionary journeys, were able to spend sufficient time in the cities and villages through which they passed, they gathered round them a little body of hearers, who, after conversion, were baptized and became the nucleus of a Christian society in that place. Often these nuclei were very small in number ; St. Paul in his letter to Philemon, sends salutations to ' the church in thy house.' The Christian body might consist, in the beginning, of one or two families, or of individual members of families, who would meet together in the house of one of the members for corporate worship and instruction. If some well-to-do citizen joined them, it might well be that his house would be used for these common meetings.

In whatever grade of society we find Christians, the first and most noticeable thing about them is their close fellowship and careful organization of a common life. They formed ' the Church ' in their own city, and belonged, at the same time, to that wider body, the church throughout the world. As individuals and as communities they were linked together by a common belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Redeemer, God in the likeness of man ; by a common initiation into the Christian society through baptism, through which they believed themselves to be incorporated into Christ ; by a common sharing of a meal

of bread and wine whereby they partook of 'the flesh of that Jesus who was made flesh'; [1] by a common acceptance of the Old Testament scriptures and the writings of the New Testament as they became available; and by a common government by overseers, who in some sense represented or acted as delegates for the apostles of the Lord.

THE MINISTRY

It will be most convenient to deal with the ministry first, since all the outward activities of the different communities centred round those entrusted with ministerial functions.

If men are to live together in the common life of society, whether it be in the widest sense of nationality or in the narrower confines of a common religious belief, or, still smaller, a guild of craftsmen or a political club, they need a leader, or a body of advisers—a committee, perhaps—who shall represent and speak for, and be the rallying-point of all the members of that society.

The Church is no exception to this rule; from the beginning communities were organized under the leadership of one or more 'elders,' 'presbyters,' 'bishops.' [2] St. Paul ordained elders in every city to carry on the work which he had begun, and these elders were regarded as having an authority which they derived from the apostle. They presided at the services and were competent to fulfil all functions of government which were of routine character. But it is clear from the Pauline Epistles no less than from the Acts of the Apostles, that the elders and

[1] Justin Martyr, *Apology*, i. 65-67.

[2] The question of a distinction between ἐπίσκοποι and πρεσβύτεροι in the church of apostolic days is too involved to be treated of here. See note at end of chapter (p. 126).

the whole body of believers looked to the apostle for ultimate direction in all things which were abnormal or created special difficulties.

Such a system of government was doubtless convenient enough in the earliest days when the apostolic founder of the Christian communities was still alive ; but difficulties were bound to arise after the apostle's death. Churches in the provinces of Asia or Achaia would naturally look to St. Paul in his lifetime, but to whom were they to turn when he was dead ? The civil government of the Empire was so organized that for all but the most important matters, each province might be regarded as an entity in itself. The towns and villages scattered throughout its area looked to the city where dwelt the proconsul and where the law courts and the headquarters of the legion were established, as the seat of authority and government. It was natural that when the work of an itinerant apostle was brought to a close, the Christian communities, seeking a new centre of authority, should turn to some special place for guidance and general control. Often the place so selected was the seat of civil government for the district, or had peculiar attraction for Christians, because of the long residence there of one of the apostles—Ephesus fulfilled both these conditions. Thus the church in Ephesus came to be held in special reverence and to be invested with an authority wider than the limits of its immediate jurisdiction. It is this fact which accounts for the position, in rather later days, of those six pre-eminent sees of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, each of which controlled churches scattered over a wide area.

But the principle of central authority was applied in a narrower and more local sense as well. In the beginning

Christianity was essentially a religion of towns ; it was in the towns, naturally, that the church was most flourishing, most efficiently organized, and, if the phrase may be used, most ' up to date.' As it spread to villages in the neighbouring district, the new and smaller communities looked to the church of their origin for guidance ; the elders in the villages conferred with those in the towns with a sense of respect for their judgment, which naturally passed into obedience to their directions. Thus there presently grew up what can only be described as the diocesan system, that is, the church of one town, and the president of that church, began to assume an authority over the churches in the immediate neighbourhood. This authority was willingly recognized and probably often asked for, and the strength which thereby accrued to the whole church of a province, or lesser area, was of the utmost value in times of persecution or internal conflict. As early as Ignatius, bishop of Antioch who was martyred about 115 A.D., the system was reasonably well established in Asia Minor.

Reference has been made to ' elders ' or ' bishops ' or ' presidents,' but nothing has as yet been said about the inner character of this ministry, and here we are faced with a problem which cannot be adequately discussed within the limits at our disposal. Let it at once be said that by the end of the second century of the Christian era we find, everywhere established, the threefold order of the ministry, bishop, priest and deacon, as it exists in the catholic church to day, Eastern, Roman, and Anglican. In that ministry, it was believed, there resided the whole authority of Christ ; through that ministry alone could be conferred upon individual souls the grace of Christ ; in union with that ministry alone was the corporate unity

of the whole body preserved. But the story of its development from apostolic days to Tertullian cannot be told in detail. Such indications of the nature of the ministry as there are, all point to this division as being the normal differentiation of ministerial functions, but they cannot be clearly distinguished in the New Testament records. The stages of growth are hidden, the gradual limitation of special functions to priests and not to deacons, or to bishops and not to priests, cannot be traced ; all we can say is that when we reach that period in church history in which ample records of her life are available, this threefold system of ministerial government exists everywhere. It was regarded as having divine sanction ; in some sense it continued, and was representative of, the apostolic ministry, and through its highest grade alone, that of the episcopate, could it be continued and passed on from generation to generation.[1] Her ministers were responsible for conducting the worship of the church, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist ; they admitted converts to the faith through baptism ; they administered the penitential discipline to those who fell away from the standard of Christian morality ; they were entrusted with the disposal of alms, and the organization of charitable works on behalf of the poorer brethren. All this is clear some time before St. Cyprian's treatise on the *Unity of the Church* ; but the history of its development is, most unfortunately, in great measure lost. Such is the nature of the ministry ; we can now pass on to consider the Church's worship.

WORSHIP

St. Luke tells us that on the mount of the Ascension the apostles worshipped Christ, and returned to Jerusalem

[1] See note at end of chapter.

with great joy, and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God. What place could there be for the worship of Christ in the ritual observances of that old Covenant, whose ministers had rejected as a false Messiah, Him Whom the disciples worshipped ?

At first the need for separation between the Jewish and Christian Church, which later became inevitable, does not seem to have occurred to that small band of believers in whose hands lay the destinies of the new religion. They frequented the temple at the regular hours of prayer as before, and it was in the temple courts that they gathered round them an audience before whom to proclaim the new glad tidings. They were still good Jews, as they had no doubt been from childhood, and they observed the religious customs of their fathers, adding to them ceremonies peculiar to their Christian belief. The same custom prevailed among the earliest communities beyond Jerusalem ; they attended the synagogue services on the Sabbath, but at least on the first day of the week (in some places apparently every day) they also met privately for the celebration of their own services. The four marks of the Church laid down in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles were continuance in ' the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers.' The breaking of bread was the crucial act in Christian worship, round which all else centred.

It was only natural that in the earliest days, before an organized system of worship could be established, the details of services varied considerably from place to place. The references to worship in the New Testament writings are of a general character, and are not concerned with the regular development of liturgical arrangements such as

would engage the attention of those in authority when Christian congregations became firmly established. The first full account of Christian worship belongs to the middle of the second century ; there are some references to it in the *Didache*, or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, a document generally dated between 80 and 100 A.D. ; but Justin Martyr is the first writer to give a full description of how he and his friends worshipped in common, about 150 A.D. We will return to that presently; there is a pagan document of great interest and importance which, since it is earlier than Justin, ought to be dealt with first.

Pliny had extracted confessions from Christians whom he had arrested in Bithynia, and had sent a report of what he had found, to Trajan, in that letter which has already been quoted. He says :

> ' They maintained, however, that the amount of their fault or error had been this, that it was their habit on a fixed day, to assemble before daylight and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as a God : and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery, or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit, when it was demanded. After this was done, it was their custom to depart and meet together again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food.'

This very early pagan reference is interesting because it gives us, from an unbiassed source, a picture of what we know later to be the main elements of Christian worship everywhere, namely, observance of the first day of the week, the worship of Christ as God, and the sharing of a common meal.

Justin wrote his apology partly to show the intellectual reasonableness of Christianity, and partly to allay those suspicions which the mysterious meetings at night had aroused, and concerning which the most horrible rumours were believed. So he gives a full description of Sunday morning worship.

> ' On the day of the Sun, all who live in towns or the country, gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to an imitation of the good examples cited. Then we all rise together and prayers are offered. At length, as I have already described, prayer being ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president offers prayer and thanksgiving to the best of his ability, and all the people assent by saying, Amen. And the distribution and sharing of that for which thanks were given, follows, and to those who were not present it is sent, by the ministry of the deacons.'

After this description, Justin goes on to comment upon it ; the passage is too long to quote, but it is of such interest and importance since it has formed the groundwork of all liturgical worship ever since, that the substance of some sentences must be reproduced. This food is called *εὐχαριστία*, the ' Thanksgiving,' and it forms the chief act of Christian worship because the apostles said that Christ had commanded them to do so, on the night before His Passion. They do not regard it as common bread and common drink, but have been taught that the food for which they give thanks is both the flesh and blood of ' that Jesus Who was made Flesh.' Only those who

are baptized and believe the Christian teaching to be true, and live as Christ commanded, are allowed to partake. They meet for worship on Sunday because on that day God began the creation, and Jesus Christ our Saviour, rose from the dead.

Though the Eucharist was thus, from earliest days, the chief service, and Sunday the one day of the week on which all Christians were expected to assemble together, there were other meetings for prayer and instruction, not only on Sundays, but on weekdays also. The *Disciplina Arcani*, which had prevented the writing down of Christian belief and the description of services, is responsible for the scantiness of our knowledge until the third century. But when the intervals between persecution were greatly prolonged, and Christians were able to come out into the open light of day, written records abound. It is from such records that the following picture is drawn.

There were, each day, services in the morning and evening, consisting mainly of psalms, prayers, reading from scripture, and possibly hymns, though these last did not form a regular part of the services till rather later. In the time of St. John Chrysostom (345-407 A.D.), the *Gloria in Excelsis* was sung in the morning, and a doxology ending with the *Nunc Dimittis*, at night, in the East. Wednesday and Friday were observed as days of special devotion, and the Eucharist was celebrated as a rule on those days, though in Africa, in St. Cyprian's time, it was apparently celebrated every day. In addition to the regular weekly or daily services, special days and seasons began to be observed. From apostolic times the day of the crucifixion and the rising from the dead on the third day were commemorated each year; and as time went on other events of importance in Our Lord's life found their

way into a regular kalendar for annual observance. In addition, the death days of martyrs were added ; days of fasting, such as Friday, and seasons such as Lent, were set aside, until by the middle of the fourth century the main outlines of the church kalendar, as it exists to-day, had taken shape throughout the Christian world.

DISCIPLINE

From the beginning the church fenced her members about with disciplinary regulations. Some general standard of conduct, certain easily remembered rules for the performance of divine worship, an universally accepted authority bestowed upon those who were to minister, general principles as to the methods of punishment for those who failed to maintain the Christian moral standard —such were the points which needed regulation and about which controversy would readily arise.

Submission to baptism and the laying on of hands was everywhere required of those who wished to become Christians. Rites of admission are common to most religions ; the Jew demanded circumcision ; Cybele's inner circle of initiates, the blood bath ; but Christian baptism was something more than an outward ceremony of admission. The neophyte was thereby endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit ; he became partaker of Christ's nature, and entered into the fullness of His mystical body, of which the church was the visible sign. Responsibilities, no less weighty than the greatness of the privileges thus bestowed, rested upon the baptized—responsibilities of which they were unable to divest themselves till death, without incurring the guilt of apostasy. Great and discriminating care was taken, therefore, in the preparation of candidates for baptism, and their admission to the

church took place publicly, in the presence of the whole congregation in each centre.

Justin Martyr gives an account of a baptism, in his first Apology, which is worth noting :

> ' As many as are persuaded and believe that the things are true which are taught by us and said to be true, and promise that they can live accordingly, are taught to pray and ask of God, with fasting, forgiveness of their former sins ; and we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us to a place where there is water, and are born again with a new birth, even as we ourselves were born again. For in the name of God the Father, and Lord of the universe, and of our saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, do they receive the washing in water.'

Here, clearly, is the germ of that long and elaborate preparation in later days when the church was able to develop her rules of conduct and procedure without fear of interference and persecution.

Constantine's edict of toleration resulted in a great influx of pagans to the church, and this sudden increase in numbers brought with it dangers which had not, hitherto, seriously threatened her life. It was necessary to preserve, with more rigid safeguards, the same high standard of morality which had prevailed when death might follow confession of the name of Christ, now that profession of Christianity was easy and generally popular. Again the tendency towards syncretism in religion would be far more likely to influence the standards of orthodoxy when philosophers were crowding to the doors, seeking admission. So from the fourth century the preparatory stages were lengthened and made more thorough.

Those desiring baptism joined a class of ' catechumens ' whose instructions might last for an almost indefinite time ; Constantine, for example, postponed his baptism till his death bed, and such instances of delay are not uncommon. This preliminary period closed with forty days of intensive preparation immediately before Easter, the actual baptism taking place on Easter Even. The candidate was required to make an act of renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to vow that he would ' give himself up to the government of Christ.' He had to make a profession of faith, and in preparation for this had been taught the chief articles of the Christian faith, in credal form, during his catechumenate : that which is now called the Apostles' Creed is generally believed to have been, in origin, the baptismal creed used by the church in Rome. After this examination had been concluded, the candidate was led to water and immersed three times, in the name of the holy Trinity : he was then taken to the bishop to receive the laying on of hands. The service concluded with the Easter celebration of the Eucharist, when for the first time he was allowed to receive the sacramental bread and wine, and to take his place with those who were already full members of the church.

Not only at the beginning of his life did the church impose a stern discipline upon the convert ; through all his subsequent years he was under rules of greater or less severity, governing his general conduct, and aiming at the highest standard of morality and spiritual attainment.

Every society has the right to punish those of its members who break its laws, and to expel recalcitrants from its fellowship if they remain obstinate. Thus punishment had to be devised for those who broke their baptismal promises. The apostles did not hesitate to use

startlingly severe methods of correction ; nothing could be more stern than St. Paul's language about the unrepentant sinner at Corinth, and all we know of the discipline of the earliest days leads us to suppose that offences against the Christian standard were punished with very great severity. But not unnaturally, as membership increased and Christianity became the predominant religion of the Empire, this rigorous attitude was not maintained ; the penalty of excommunication, which was the chief weapon in the first two centuries, was reserved only for the gravest crimes, when the church became popular and prosperous. It was only after prolonged struggle, however, that the more lenient treatment of offenders became general. Tertullian, and rigorists like him, maintained that forgiveness was possible only once to those who fell from grace after baptism ; upon a second fall such an one must be thrust out of the church for ever. This conflict between rigorism and leniency was a continual source of trouble ; Montanism arose partly as a protest against leniency ; and Novatianism and Donatism were both concerned with disciplinary questions, as a subsequent chapter will show ; but in the end leniency prevailed.

Excommunication was still used, but it was not necessarily life-long. If, after a period of time, the guilty person showed signs of repentance, he might be admitted to the rank of ' penitent ' : in this condition he would remain until the authorities, the parochial or diocesan clergy, considered that his penitence was sincere and his punishment sufficient. While he was a ' penitent ' he was forbidden to receive the Holy Communion, being dismissed after the introductory prayers and before the most solemn part of the service began. He had to perform certain expiatory actions and make reparation, if it were

possible ; but in time he might be restored to full membership as of old. This was known as the lesser excommunication because it could be revoked after a time ; but sinners guilty of the gravest crimes, such as adultery, murder, or apostasy, were punished with the greater excommunication, which cut off a man from all fellowship with the church and with Christians, until death. After the local church had heard the case and pronounced judgment, notice of its action was usually sent to all congregations in the district, and sometimes to the chief churches all over the world, so that the offender was universally excommunicated. The sentence applied not only in spiritual matters, such as exclusion from the sacraments and the denial of Christian burial ; it also covered common life. It could not deprive a man of his civil rights, but Christians were forbidden to eat with one who was excommunicate in the greater degree, or to have any commercial dealings with him, or to share in any entertainment at which he was present. Two stories, widely separated in time, illustrate this practice : Irenaeus relates that once St. John entered the baths at Ephesus, and, finding the heretic Cerinthus there, fled from the place, lest disaster should befall him for being under the same roof as one condemned by the church. The evidence for this story is not entirely reliable, but the witness of St. Augustine, in the other instance, is unimpeachable : He says that when he was a Manichaean, his mother so hated and detested the blasphemy of his error, that she forbade him even to eat with her at the same table in her own house.[1] Though Augustine had not at that time been converted to the Christian faith, Monnica was evidently applying to him the rules to be observed with excommunicate persons,

[1] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. iii. chap. xi.

treating him as if he had already been baptized. And the story is interesting further, since it shows that this stern discipline was still applied in Augustine's day, though even in grave sin the tendency to leniency was already making itself felt, and finally in this matter also, almost entirely superseded the rigorism of earlier days.

Bodily discipline was no new thing in religious history. The Greek philosophers laid stress upon the value of asceticism, and many pagan cults included times of fasting among the rules for their initiates. But the church took over the practice, not from the pagan philosophers, but from the example of Christ Himself, Who, as a member of the Jewish nation, was obedient to its rules as to fasting at stated times of the year. The devout Jew fasted twice in the week, as we are reminded in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican; in addition there were periods of fasting in the 4th, 5th, 7th and 10th months; the church built up her system upon these Jewish precedents.

The Jew fasted on Monday and Thursday, keeping the Sabbath as a feast; the Christian made the first day of the week (Sunday) a holy day of festival and fasted on Wednesday and Friday. The change from Sabbath to Sunday needs no explanation other than that already quoted from Justin Martyr; and the alteration of the fasting days is fairly obvious when it is remembered that Friday was naturally observed since it was the day on which Christ had been crucified, and, according to the usual reckoning, it was on the Wednesday of that week that the rulers had taken counsel how they might take him.

Services were always held on these days as well as on Sunday, and no food was eaten until after the ninth hour, that is, three o'clock in the afternoon. They were called

the ' station days,' the name being derived from a military term ; the soldier on guard in a camp was *in statione* ; so the Christian mounted guard on these days, spending the time in watching and prayer. The word ' vigil,' which is applied still to some fasting days, has the same origin.

The forty days of Lent, which in later times became the chief period of fasting, was certainly not generally established till the fourth century, but from very early days there was a strict fast immediately before Easter, which probably lasted from Maundy-Thursday night to Easter morning, the hours of Christ's passion and of His resting in the tomb. By degrees it became customary for the forty days preceding the Easter festival to be set apart for the final instruction of those who were preparing for baptism, and ultimately the season was observed as a time of discipline by all Christians, partly in preparation for Easter and partly in remembrance of Christ's temptation in the wilderness.

As the church kalendar developed, other fasting days and seasons were ordered to be observed ; but they need not engage our attention here, since they belong to the study of liturgiology rather than of church history in its strict sense. The instances given will suffice to show that life was regulated and disciplined by authority, and that systematic fasting was universally established as part of the spiritual training of each member of the whole body.

Thus the discipline imposed upon the church was designed not only to secure the admission to the Christian body of those alone who gave promise of being worthy of their privileges, not only to correct and punish those who by their actions belied their calling and brought shame upon the whole society, but also to assist the faithful

Christian to resist the temptations which beset him, and to set him forward on the path of holiness.

SOCIAL LIFE

In many ways conversion to Christianity involved so complete a change of outlook towards everyday social life, that the obstacles, which custom and etiquette and ordinary business put in the way of a convert, cannot be appreciated without some general idea of the social conditions of the first three centuries of the Christian era. The following sketch is chiefly confined to Rome, but since its main features were reproduced in all large towns it will sufficiently serve our purpose.

Roman society consisted roughly of three classes : the nobility, who composed the Senate, and in whose hands were all the functions of government ; the middle classes —doctors, schoolmasters, bakers, and all engaged in trade —and below them, the slave population. The democratic government of republican days had given place to an oligarchy consisting in theory of the Emperor and the Senate, but in practice, more generally, of the Emperor's immediate friends in civil and military life. The bulk of the population had no voice in political matters, and the division between the three classes, though it could be, and was bridged from time to time, created such an effectual barrier, that mutual understanding was almost impossible ; thus social unrest was always ready to break out in some form or other.

There was much luxury among the wealthy, and doubtless instances could be multiplied to show how badly slaves were treated ; but any wholesale condemnation of Roman society as ' corrupt to the core ' is untrue. The Christian moral standard was immeasureably beyond the

accepted code of the day, and by its striking contrast, threw into high relief the extravagance of prominent citizens or the sufferings of inoffensive slaves. Temperance, sobriety, brotherly kindliness towards all men were not maxims calculated to receive the enthusiastic support of a Nero or a Caligula, but they were the staple teaching of Seneca and Epictetus, of Plutarch and Marcus Aurelius. Perhaps the force of the moral challenge flung down before the Roman world by the followers of Christ lay in this, that Christians lived out in daily life those precepts which the philosophers had been content to philosophize about for so many generations, and somehow had failed to translate into practical application.

The difference, then, in moral outlook, and the necessity to live strictly according to this higher code in every department of life, affecting the individual in his personal conduct no less than in his relations with his fellow men in business or pleasure, were serious difficulties to the new convert; some illustrations of their incidence may be useful.

Patria potestas, though a declining force, was the basis of the family, and inevitably influenced the whole social life of Rome. The father of each family had absolute power over his children, which lasted even after his son's marriage, and included, in childhood, the power of life and death. A delicate or deformed child, or a girl born when a son had been desired, might be drowned, as a litter of kittens is drowned to-day, or could be exposed by the roadside to die or be carried off by a compassionate passer-by. The father could sell his son or daughter into slavery, and could inflict almost any punishment to compel obedience. It must not be supposed that the Roman father was necessarily a brutal, tyrannizing ruler of his house-

hold ; wonderful testimonies to parental care and filial devotion exist ; the tribute of Horace to his father's love is imperishable ; [1] and public opinion prevented unduly harsh exercise of paternal rights. But the conception of family life based upon the fatherly love of God, which St. Paul depicts in so many of his letters, involved something like a revolution in the relationship between fathers and sons. And not only in disciplinary matters was trouble bound to arise if a member of a family embraced Christianity. There was hardly a detail of everyday life which was not, in some way or other, associated with the ' little folk ' of whom mention has been made in a previous chapter. St. Augustine speaks of the custom of ' allotting to every individual thing the special function of some divinity.' [2] The following quotation from Prudentius, in Glover's *Conflict of Religions*, vividly describes the atmosphere of superstition which clung round the household : ' Infancy drank in error with its mother's milk. Amid his cries, the sacred meal was put between the baby's lips. . . . As a little child he saw the image of Fortune with her horn of wealth, and the sacred stone that stood by the house, and his mother, pale at her prayers before it. Soon himself too, raised high on his nurse's shoulders, he pressed his lips to the stone, poured forth his childish prayers and asked riches for himself, from the blind rock, and was sure that whatever one wished, that was where to ask.' [3] Even if his family did not cut him off, or denounce him to the civil authorities as one who practised a *religio illicita*, it must have been almost impossible for the convert to remain at home and witness superstitious practices such as these.

[1] Horace, *Sat.* i. 7, 70 *seq.* [2] *City of God*, iv. 8.
[3] *Contra Symmachum*, i. 197 *seq.*

The normal means of recreation presented no less serious problems. If a Christian accepted an invitation to dine, he would almost certainly be expected to eat of the 'meat offered to idols.' What was his attitude to be? If he ate of it he seemed to be tolerating the worship of idols; if he refused, he was guilty of discourtesy to his host, and of course exposed himself to the risk of immediate arrest as an openly declared follower of Christ. St. Paul gave certain general directions to his converts at Corinth, where the question was urgent in his time, but the kind of compromise which he suggested could not cover every case, and the difficulty must have caused many a Christian to refrain from the ordinary usages of hospitality.

Attendance at the theatres and public games was forbidden. The low moral tone of popular plays made it impossible for a Christian to reconcile his strict standard of purity with his presence at shows which were openly profligate and degenerate; and the brutality of the spectacles provided in the amphitheatre revealed so degraded a point of view of the dignity of human life, that no one who believed that Christ had taken upon Himself human nature, could watch the contests between beasts and men, and not feel that in some way he had witnessed an outrage upon God.

One of the most noteworthy characteristics of the early church is the close fellowship which existed between individual members of local communities. The explanation is not far to seek: cut off from much of the intercourse with their pagan fellow citizens, in fear of persecution, with a standard of life wholly antipathetic to that universally prevailing, they were turned in upon themselves and driven by force of circumstance to form the closest mutual ties. They did not cut themselves off

entirely from the common life of their neighbours, but inevitably they moved with a certain constraint, in an atmosphere essentially hostile to the claims they put forward.

This isolation was of great value and enabled the church to build up a code of morality, and to test it in practice, before her tenets became popular, and the rapid influx of pagans in the fourth century brought in its train the dangers of a weakened moral force and an emasculated gospel.

The duty of almsgiving was insisted upon everywhere. The infant church at Jerusalem seems to have made an experiment, and not altogether successfully, in a communal distribution of wealth. This system broke down and was never again attempted ; but St. Paul constantly urges the obligation of support of the poorer brethren, and there are many instances of liberal offerings on the part of individuals. Barnabas sold his property in Cyprus for this purpose, and Marcion, about the middle of the second century, gave a present of 20,000 sesterces to the church in Rome. Indeed, the liberality of the Roman church both towards her own needy members and to those of other communities in distress, is constantly referred to in terms of high praise by early writers.

It might have been expected that the teaching of social brotherhood and the ensuing popularity of the new religion with the slave population, would lead to civil disorder. Rome lived in constant dread of slave risings, and continually only staved off attempted revolution by a fresh corn dole. Yet there is no instance of such a rising caused by Christian preaching or led by Christian slaves. Every effort was made to establish a new relationship between masters and slaves, based upon the ethical

teaching of the gospels : slaves must be loyal to their masters and work honestly in their behalf as being the servants of Christ. So also masters must remember that they have a master in heaven to whom they look for mercy and consideration, and must treat their slaves in such manner as they hope to be treated by God. There is clearly no attempt here to abolish slavery, but there can be little doubt that this teaching profoundly influenced the social life of Rome. Even Gibbon, who would not readily attribute social progress to the work of Christian preachers, admits that the abolition of the enslavement of captives by Constantine was due to the new sense of mutual responsibility between masters and slaves, fostered and developed by Christian precept and example.

St. Paul, who often found the civil authorities to be his best friends, taught the necessity of obedience to the civil power as being the instrument of God. His own experience and his upbringing would influence him and naturally incline him towards such teaching ; but under very different conditions, the church held fast to the principles he laid down. In all possible ways the Christian was bidden to obey imperial decrees ; it was only when such decrees came into conflict with his loyalty to Christ that he might resist. This is the meaning of St. Peter's appeal, in his first epistle, that Christians should suffer for the name of Christ, and not as evil doers ; and it explains the boast of the Apologists that if the gaols were full of Christians, they were full of them, not because they were criminals, but because they were Christians.

In no case was active resistance to authority countenanced ; Christians could never organize a public protest, or ' hold an indignation meeting ' against unjust laws ; they must show their disapproval by passive resistance.

Thus it is that, as a rule, they were content simply to refuse to offer the accustomed libation to the emperor's statue, and then to wait for the punishment which they knew must follow. Of course there were instances where hot-headed Christians provoked disorder, but they were rare, or at anyrate few records of them exist, and such action was contrary to the express directions of their bishops.

The foregoing sketch might give an impression, at first sight, of a society of people very much isolated from their fellows, perhaps rather puritanic and gloomy, living a furtive, underground kind of existence and quite content with their own circle. But such a conclusion would be wholly false. They were not so much separated from ordinary life as might be supposed.

Though the threat of persecution was not finally removed until 313, (for practical purposes the work of Julian the apostate may be ignored), there were long intervals of peace between, and it by no means follows that a record of persecution in one place implies an outbreak of fury all over the Empire. In peaceful days Christians came out into the open, waxing more bold ; they took part in the commercial and political life of their city, and some of them entered the army. They did not lower their standard or attempt to approximate their point of view to that of their neighbours ; rather they displayed the power and beauty of their religion, bearing witness by their lives to its simplicity and purity, and giving the lie to those base calumnies which were laid against them.

Thus pagans had many opportunities to learn, to examine, and to criticize this new sect, and though they were often slow to profess Christianity, many of them greatly admired it in secret, and acknowledged its precepts as being a more excellent way than their own. Hence

there was a steady permeation of Roman society by Christian moral principles, which made Constantine's edict of toleration all the easier of acceptance. It equally accounts for the absence of violent upheaval in the middle years of the fourth century, when, for the first time, the implications of Christian morals were given the force of law.

Again, the picture of a gloomy, self-centred community is quite wrong. Everywhere Christian congregations were characterized by a sense of joyous freedom and mutual love which was the envy of those afflicted with that *taedium vitae*, so common a trait in the educated pagan. That joyousness sprang, not from the reckless indulgence of every passion, or the wild extravagance which the possession of wealth and power made possible; it was the joy of an 'other-worldliness.' Its basis lay in personal intercourse with Christ, Who not only had set before men the most glorious example of nobility in life, but had broken down all racial and social barriers, and had knit men together in a brotherhood whose limits were set, not in time but in eternity. They spoke of their friends as 'Brethren'; one of their earliest gatherings was the Agape, the love feast; and their interest in the well-being of communities far distant from their own marks a breadth of charity hitherto unknown.

All these things profoundly influenced the pagan attitude towards them. The church was slow to expand in the first 250 years of her life, and the rapidity of her growth in the next two generations would be inexplicable were it not for the fact that that inner life of purity, of joy, of mutual charity, had worked like leaven upon the vast pagan population which surrounded her. She only waited for the long peace between 253 and 302, and for

the final triumph of 313 A.D. to bring the nations in their thousands, seeking admission to that fold in which harmony and mutual love were the predominant characteristics.

NOTE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINISTRY

Partly because of the general scheme and purpose of this book, and partly because of the exigencies of space, it has been impossible to deal with the difficult question of the growth of the ministry from the rather vague indications of its nature in the New Testament, to its complete organization and character in the third century. The reader who desires to investigate the question for himself is referred more especially to the following books :

GORE, *The Church and the Ministry* (revised by C. H. Turner, 1919).
GORE, *Orders and Unity*.
LIGHTFOOT, *Introduction to the Epistle to the Philippians*.
LIGHTFOOT, *Dissertations*.
MOBERLY, *Ministerial Priesthood*.
SWETE, *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*.

CHAPTER VI

INTERNAL DISSENSIONS BEFORE 325 A.D.

THAT harmony which was spoken of in the last chapter as so prominent a characteristic of early days, did not long remain unbroken. Perhaps it was too tender a plant to take root in the shallow soil of a rough world ; or perhaps it was ideal rather than actual, and forms part of that halo of glory which fourth century historians have flung round the church of apostolic days. However that may be, the church of the second and third centuries was faced, not only with danger due to official opposition, not only with the problems which arose from the impact of philosophic speculation, but in no less degree with difficulties and dangers caused by dissensions among her own members.

Three movements of this period more particularly need our attention—Montanism, Novatianism, Donatism. There were other disagreements, which from time to time caused heart-burnings and needed corrective treatment ; but these three are the most important, and in many ways the most interesting of those hindrances to unity, before the doctrinal struggles of the fourth and fifth centuries. Though their stories differ widely one from another, there are many points of contact between them, and the fundamental cause for their appearance is the same in each case.

At the beginning of the last chapter reference was made to the fact that the steady development of organization and of central authority and control within the church, led to reactions in favour, either of greater liberty, or yet greater rigidity. Montanism, Novatianism, Donatism, illustrate the truth of this contention, for though the immediate reasons for their appearance and the nature of their protests were dissimilar, and though each developed on different lines, yet in their essence they were protests against official action on the part of the church and the claims of her leaders, the bishops, to be heard and obeyed as princes with unquestionable authority. It will be most satisfactory to deal with each of these movements separately.

MONTANISM

Professor Pollard says [1] that there are four questions which every student of history is called upon to answer : When ? Where ? How ? Why ? And he goes on to say that of these, the question Why ? is the most difficult and profound, and few students set themselves systematically to answer it. Fortunately the reason for the appearance of Montanism in the second half of the second century A.D. does not present any serious difficulty. It arose just as the Gnostic [2] influence upon the church was beginning to wane ; it was in part a protest against Gnosticism itself, and in part a reaction against the attitude adopted by the episcopate in matters of organization, which were themselves caused by the Gnostic attack. The Gnostics laid stress upon the importance of learning and the value of speculation in matters of faith ; but they carried this perfectly legitimate principle to such lengths

[1] *Factors in Modern History*, p. 27. [2] See next chapter.

that, had they succeeded in winning the chief bishops to their side, Christianity would have lost its pristine purity and simplicity, and the gospel would have been emptied of much of its essential character. Montanism appeared, therefore, as a revival of primitive Christianity ; its watchword might well have been ' Back to Christ and the Gospels,' for it laid great stress upon the literal interpretation of the New Testament, and disparaged learning. On the other hand, in the struggle to maintain unimpaired her standard of doctrine, her scriptures, and her ministry, the church seemed to be adopting too rigid an attitude, and to be leaving no liberty of thought or expression to the individual. The Montanists endeavoured to check this tendency by restoring that freedom for prophesying which was a marked feature of the apostolic church, and by claiming for the individual a liberty of opinion and practice untrammelled, to a large extent, by the voice of ecclesiastical authority.

It began in Phrygia about 150 A.D. under the leadership of Montanus, who was reported to be a converted priest of Cybele. His own previous religious experience, and the natural excitability of the Phrygians, largely account for the excesses which accompanied the movement. He had no intention of separating from the church ; he desired to revive that sense of the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit, which he felt had yielded to officialdom. But with a temperament naturally prone to ecstasy, he soon passed beyond the bounds of what was felt to be legitimate in the use of the gift of tongues, and believed himself to be completely possessed by the Holy Spirit. Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis about 374 A.D., in his book against heresies which he called *Panarion* (the bread basket), says that Montanus declared himself to be ' The

Lord God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Paraclete.' It is quite probable that Epiphanius makes Montanus say more than he actually said. But he seems to have maintained that he had an exclusive gift of prophecy, and that he had received a special revelation that he was the last prophet who should appear before the return of Christ to reign upon the earth. He was joined by two women prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, and these three, laying great stress on St. John's gospel and the Apocalypse, went about declaring that the end of all things was at hand, and that the new Jerusalem would shortly descend from Heaven, in the literal manner in which that event had been described in the closing chapters of the Revelation of St. John.

As might be expected from the nature of the Phrygians, his message met with instant success, and amid scenes of wild excitement, multitudes left home and family and business, and flocked to Pepuza, the place indicated by the Spirit as that where the new Jerusalem would shortly appear. Revivalism and the emotional excess which often accompanies such movements, was no new thing in Phrygia. Priests of Cybele and of Isis were continually going about the villages stirring up fresh zeal for their particular faith ; so in some ways the ground was well prepared for Montanus and his prophetesses, and on its native soil the new teaching spread rapidly. Nor was it confined to the mountainous country of Asia Minor. The readiness of the whole world to listen to a new prophet, and to seize upon fresh promises of redemption, during the first three centuries after the birth of Christ, was noticed in a previous chapter. Montanism came as a new ' thrill,' a fresh excitement, and speedily made its way from Asia to Africa, Rome, and the Rhone valley.

The martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, who perished in 177 A.D., sent letters from their prison to Eleutherus, bishop of Rome, by the hands of Irenaeus (not yet bishop), asking him what action ought to be taken towards the preachers of this new doctrine. Evidently it had reached the Rhone valley and had met with considerable success, within twenty years of its first appearance.

But beyond the borders of its native country, it was in Africa that it was most successful. The stern asceticism which its adherents practised, in preparation for the approaching end, was peculiarly attractive to the Punic mind, with its gloomy, severe outlook upon life, and its passionate temperament. There was much in it to attract a man of Tertullian's disposition, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find that in the end he declared himself a Montanist. He was responsible for a schism in the African church which grew to considerable proportions with the aid of his powerful influence, and survived for more than two hundred years after his death, its adherents being called ' Tertullianists.'

It must be remembered that Montanus had no intention, originally, of separating from the church. His aim was to call her back to what he believed to be the standard of primitive Christianity in faith and morals ; so his work was confined, in the beginning, within the borders of the church. There was some disposition on the part of ecclesiastical authority, perhaps not unnaturally, to favour it upon its first appearance. It seemed to be an attempt to throw fresh emphasis upon certain aspects of faith and practice, which were possibly in danger of being forgotten or neglected, rather than to be setting forth a new religion. Some time was needed to show whither it was leading before action could be taken. Eleutherus, probably

acting upon suggestions made by the church of Lyons, dealt gently with the Montanists of southern Gaul; but he was far removed from the place of its origin, and not able to form an accurate opinion of its value or bearing upon Christian life. The Asiatic bishops were more favourably placed, and sternly condemned the ecstatic utterances and wild excesses of emotional fervour, and the general unsettlement of normal life, which distinguished converts to Montanism. It was a cause of serious division among Christians, and, as is almost inevitable in movements of the kind, it gradually developed an organization of its own, independent of, if not entirely apart from the organization of the church. As the coming of the new Jerusalem was delayed, and still further delayed, the name of the town Pepuza was changed to Jerusalem; it became a holy place and the established centre of the new opinions. Bishops and priests who supported it were bound to submit to the prophets and their successors, as having greater authority than they, to speak for and rule over the faithful. Thus it was not long before all the elements were present for the making of a sect outside the official church, and when Victor, bishop of Rome from 193 to 202 A.D., finally pronounced against Montanism, it was too firmly established to submit to his ruling, and so maintained an independence in opposition to orthodox Christianity. Although the schism was officially healed through the instrumentality of St. Augustine in the early years of the fifth century, it lingered on in Asia Minor until well into the seventh century.

There are four chief ways in which Montanism departed from orthodox standards of belief and practice. None of them were in themselves heretical; all of them had a definite place in church life; it was by over-emphasis

rather than by novelty that Montanus and his followers fell into error.

The first was their use of prophecy. There were prophets in the apostolic church as there had been in the church of the old dispensation—prophets whose work was something more than the speaking with tongues, which marked the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church at Pentecost, or upon the household of Cornelius after Peter's preaching at Caesarea. The prophet might speak with tongues in an ecstasy, using a jargon of words which his hearers did not understand, but in so doing, as St. Paul is careful to point out (1 Cor. xiv. 2, 3), he was speaking to God and not to men. The essential work of a prophet, either Hebrew or Christian, was to proclaim to man the message of God. For that purpose intelligible speech must be used, and the gift of reason exercised. Further, though the prophet might feel the hand of God 'strong upon him,' as Ezekiel did, there was no absolute compulsion to speak. The prophet did not lose his own individuality in declaring his message; he spoke for God and in His Name, but he was free to speak or keep silent as he chose. There was a real distinction in the Christian church between the *glossalalia* (the speaking with tongues) and the normal prophetic work. Nor did the church regard her prophets as being infallibly inspired; St. John warns his children not to be led astray by the many false prophets who have come into the world; and the *Didache* suggests certain tests to be imposed in order to ascertain whether a so-called prophet is true or false. Montanus combined ecstasy and prophecy, regarding himself as the passive instrument through whom the Paraclete spoke, if he did not definitely claim to be the Paraclete himself. His theory was parallel to the

pagan belief that, at the oracle, the voice of the god was heard through the human medium. So whatever might be the message delivered through the lips of the Montanist prophet, since it was God Himself who spoke, that message had the divine authority and could be subject to no alteration or fresh interpretation. This was never claimed by the orthodox : had it been so, it would have resulted in endless confusion if, as might well be, contradictory messages were delivered, and it would almost certainly have ended in the destruction of internal unity. There could be no place in such a scheme for human reason or the exercise of corporate authority with power to restrain and control individuals. It was bound to issue in antinomianism, the bugbear of all social life and the most frequent cause of disunion in all history.

This lawlessness is particularly noticeable in the second point of divergence from orthodox standards, namely, the stress Montanists laid upon an universal priesthood. The gifts of the Spirit had been poured out upon men indiscriminately, they said, in the beginning ; but now bishops and priests had taken the place of apostles and prophets, and had reserved to themselves the privileges and dignity hitherto shared by all alike. There is just so much of truth in this contention as to make it most difficult of refutation. Apart altogether from the question whether the ministry, as it had been developed by the end of the second century, was of divine institution or not, it was inevitable, as a matter of practicable politics, that some sort of easily recognizable authority should be established. Presently the Montanists themselves acknowledged this and established a central government with two grades of ministers, the Patriarchs and the Kenons. In some sense there is an universal priesthood in the church, but it

cannot exclude or override a properly organized body of officials, and this was the danger in the Montanist claim. For the sake of the well-being of the church the claims of the episcopate had to be maintained, and all subsequent history has shown that wherever these claims have been rejected, a fresh body of officials has been created, so that, as Milton said, ' The new presbyter is but the old priest writ large.'

As in the question of the ministry they protested against the growing rigidity of the ecclesiastical system, so in disciplinary matters they complained of increasing laxity, and urged the imposition of stricter rules of life and conduct. Tertullian was attracted by this call to a stricter life, and it is undeniably the best feature of Montanism, though it was undoubtedly out of touch with the less rigorous standard of the times. They fasted more often, and for longer periods than the church, saying that it was a law of the Paraclete that they should do so ; and no particular objection could be laid against the custom since no grave principle was involved. But their teaching as to marriage was most offensive, and though it did not gain official approval, it has had an unwholesome influence upon much that churchmen have written and taught upon the subject.

Tertullian is the chief exponent of their views, and though he extols Christian marriage, there is always behind his statements a feeling that it is really a concession to human weakness, and that the single life is more pleasing to God. A second marriage was prohibited as being adulterous, a point of view which had previously been held by some, but was being abandoned when the Montanists revived it through the skilled advocacy of Tertullian. The argument was based upon the theory that

marriage is a contract for eternity, an opinion in flat contradiction to the teaching of Christ and of the regulations laid down by St. Paul.

They were no less rigorous in their regulations about those who had fallen into grave sin. In the last chapter attention was drawn to the tendency to give more lenient treatment to those who had defiled the holiness of the body of Christ. The Montanists refused to allow any departure from what they believed to be the strict discipline of apostolic days. No one, they said, who had been guilty of those sins which were commonly acknowledged to be deadly, could be readmitted to Christian fellowship, no matter how deep and abiding his penitence might be. The Paraclete said by the mouth of Montanus, 'The church has power to forgive sins, but I will not do it lest men commit other sins.' In effect such a position was a denial of God's mercy, and altogether alien to the teaching of Christ; the church, therefore, rejected it as an intolerable regulation, calculated to drive men away from Christianity rather than to attract them to it.

Perhaps Montanism is most easily remembered because of its belief in the almost immediate return of Christ to reign upon the earth for a thousand years. Chiliasm, or Millenarianism, has constantly reappeared in all ages of the church, and there have never been wanting those who, in every catastrophic event, have seen a warning of the second Advent. At the beginning of their ministry the apostles probably believed that Christ would return again in their own lifetime; St. Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians is full of the idea of an imminent return. But the results of such teaching were disastrous in the unsettlement of life and the general excitement which not unnaturally followed. His second letter to the Thessa-

lonians was written in part to correct the impression made by the former epistle. Though at the end of his life St. Paul seems to go back, in some degree, to his earlier belief in the near approach of ' the day of the Lord,' there is a far less confident note, far less sense of urgency, and in this he reflects the general mind of the church. With the death of St. John that expectation receded steadily from men's minds, and by the middle of the second century had been abandoned. When the Paraclete, through the mouth of Montanus, indicated Pepuza as the place where the new Jerusalem would shortly appear, hope or fear was rekindled in the hearts of his excitable hearers, and for a time the claims of normal life gave way to a state of feverish expectancy which coloured the moral code of Montanism long after its adherents had settled down again to ordinary conditions.

Though it never succeeded in bringing the church to accept its point of view, and the struggle was short, Montanism had great and lasting effect upon orthodox Christianity. Prophecy fell into disrepute and with it much of the enthusiasm of earlier days. As abuses crept in, it became increasingly difficult for the reformer to raise his voice in protest, or, having spoken, to gain a sympathetic hearing. It was not altogether an unmixed blessing that for a thousand years (from the close of the Christological discussions after the council of Chalcedon in 451, to the age of Luther) few voices were heard in the church except of those who were prepared to repeat official pronouncements. Liberty of thought and speech need not, of necessity, involve denial of the faith ; there was room for the exercise of the prophetic gift within the limits of orthodoxy, but it was frowned upon and seldom used. The preaching orders of the thirteenth century were in

one sense a return to the use of prophecy which had failed, through Montanism, to retain its place in the general scheme of church life. But the stereotyping of the christian message, which was inevitable when liberty for prophesying was curtailed, found the church utterly unable to give men a new lead, a fresh inspiration, when the flood-tide of the new learning broke upon her walls in the sixteenth century.

Again, that emphasis upon the authority of the ministry, which inevitably resulted from the subversion of its claims by Montanus, reacted not entirely for good. The value of such a ministry need not be emphasised again ; sufficient has already been said to show its importance from the point of view of organization. It is undeniable that the life of the church was often preserved from disruption, or from the acceptance of doctrine and practice contrary to apostolic teaching, by the work of that ministry. But its authority was exalted, to some extent, at the expense of the laity ; the sense of individual responsibility for corporate well-being, lay no less than clerical, was seriously impaired. As time went on the church became identified with the clergy in popular thought, with most unfortunate results : disagreement with clerical opinion was easily translated into disloyalty or heresy, as the history of later centuries too often shows. Further, it led to that theory of a dual standard of morality, one for the clergy and another for the laity, which has always been one of the root causes of Christian failure. The Montanists pushed the claim of the priesthood of all Christians beyond what was reasonable or in accord with apostolic directions ; but the study of history shows that the reaction in favour of clericalism led to grave disadvantages, and opened the way to serious abuses in the centuries which followed.

The rejection of Millenarianism was probably the most useful result of the quarrel. It enabled men to settle down to ordinary Christian life : to work for Christ's coming, not in feverish haste, but with a sense that the building of the City of God is a long process, in which nothing can be left half done or badly finished, in short a work for which ample time is necessary. If it encouraged in some quarters the thought of Christ as ' a king departed to a far country,' [1] it enabled men to look for His coming in the everyday events of life, to link up common experience with the Incarnation, and to find Christ continually revealed, in the market-place, on the battlefield, in the healing of disease, or the training of the young. The full implications of the gospel of the Incarnation could not be realized while men, living in an atmosphere of feverish expectancy, abandoned all the ordinary duties of life, looking for His coming momentarily, in the sky. The essential work of the church is to teach men to live no less than to prepare them for death, and this work became more possible and effective as Chiliasm faded from sight.

THE TREATMENT OF THE LAPSED : NOVATIANISM

The reasons for the second of these three movements and the details of its story bear little resemblance to Montanism at first sight. Yet fundamentally the same principle is at work, though in this question a fresh consideration appears. In the church's treatment of the Lapsed, it is not only that protesting voices are raised against the supposedly unwarrantable claims of the episcopate to a final authority ; another issue emerges, which is still more prominent in the Donatist struggle

[1] Gwatkin, *Early Church History*, vol. ii. p. 93.

fifty years later, namely, this: How can the church preserve her essential holiness, and yet retain within her commonwealth unworthy members?

Though the problem of the Lapsed arose in widely scattered districts, it was particularly urgent in Carthage, and it will suffice for our purpose to follow it there.

The Emperor Decius (249-251 A.D.) is reckoned as the seventh persecutor. The church had enjoyed comparative peace since the days of Commodus (180-192), for there had been no serious outbreak of persecution in that half-century. Maximin (235-238) had endeavoured to stamp out Christianity by putting to death, or sending into exile, the more prominent clergy; but his successors were either too much occupied in trying to establish their very precarious tenure of the imperial office, or were too much interested in Eastern cults, to trouble about it. Philip the Arabian, who immediately preceded Decius, seems to have been friendly towards the Christians; the suggestion that he himself accepted the Christian faith is without foundation, but his tolerance encouraged them to a more open profession of their religion. Towards the close of his reign, however, there were signs of a coming change of policy. When the Empire celebrated in 248 A.D. its great festival in commemoration of the 1000th year since its foundation, there was much to chasten the natural joyousness of the occasion. On the Eastern frontier the threat from Persia, always present, was becoming a serious menace; beyond the Danube the Goth was steadily pressing southwards; the military prowess of Rome, once invincible, and upon which she had built up a thousand years of ever-widening supremacy, was in danger, if not of eclipse, at all events of grave diminution. What was the cause? Who was to blame? It was noticed that a

considerable body of people, the Christians, took no part in the celebrations; once again, therefore, the charge of lack of patriotism was laid against them. There is no evidence of violence in Rome, but riots broke out in Alexandria and much loss of life ensued. Philip died in the autumn of 249 A.D. and was succeeded by Decius, a Roman of the school of Augustus and Marcus Aurelius. Eager to restore the old *pietas et gravitas*, a champion of the old native religion of Republican days, he was the natural leader of the pagans in their freshly aroused hostility to the followers of Christ.

Decius is famous in church history as the first Emperor to organize a systematic persecution throughout his dominions; earlier persecutions were due, as a rule, to mob violence, and were local in their incidence. Decius determined to root out the pestilent heresy from every corner of the Empire. To this end he issued an edict, the first of its kind, ordering that in every city, before a certain date, all citizens were to appear before the magistrates and either offer sacrifice to the gods as of old, or produce sufficient evidence that they were in the habit of doing so; in return they were to receive a certificate [1] (*libellus*) signed by the presiding official.

The attack fell upon the church with the surprise and force of a hurricane; everywhere there was consternation and probably considerable apostasy. But we will confine ourselves to Carthage. Here either the edict was more thoroughly enforced than in some places, or Christians were more than usually weak. St. Cyprian's description of the low moral standard in his diocese, quoted in Chapter III., lends support to this latter suggestion. But what-

[1] A specimen of these *libelli* is printed at the end of the chapter, p. 150.

ever might be the cause of so great weakness, the persecution brought new and most difficult problems to the authorities of the African church. Many apostatized, some going to the place appointed, defiantly, and as it were in bravado; others, fearing the censure of the church, yet still more afraid of the consequences if they could not produce their certificates, came to some terms with the magistrates whereby, though they did not sacrifice, they obtained *libelli*, saying they had done so. There were thus two classes of people to be dealt with, the genuine and the feigned apostatizers. When the storm abated they came back, clamouring for readmission to the society whose faith they had denied when in peril of their lives. Cyprian was appealed to, but gave the only answer possible to one in his position, for apostasy was still one of those offences which laid a man under the greater excommunication; he ordered that repentant renegades were to be excluded from communion, and only granted absolution if they were at the point of death.

There the question might have ended, for his answer was perfectly in accord with the general practice of the church; but two other factors encouraged opposition. First, great respect was always paid to the dying requests of martyrs, and by a natural transference those in prison for Christ's name, who were ready to suffer death if it came, but had not yet been called upon to face it, were regarded with particular honour and respect. These people were known as 'Confessors,' and often their letters from prison were received with an authority much greater than they deserved on their merits—authority which sometimes came dangerously near to overriding the rulings of a local bishop.

Thus it was in Carthage: confessors sent *libelli pacis*

(certificates of peace) for particular renegades, to Cyprian, bidding him receive such an one to communion forthwith. Sometimes the *libellus* included a man ' and his friends ' or ' and his household,' in such general terms as to make any investigation impossible, and thus entirely to set at nought the regular discipline of the church. It was difficult for Cyprian to ignore requests from those enduring imprisonment and, so far as was known, in daily expectation of martyrdom ; but the holiness of the church had to be preserved and her discipline maintained. So he refused to yield to their plea for more lenient treatment, and held that the apostatizers must remain excommunicate till a council could be summoned to consider the problem.

The second factor gives little credit to those concerned. Novatus, a presbyter of Carthage, was one of a small group of clergy who had objected to Cyprian's election to the episcopate, and he seized upon this opportunity to make things unpleasant for his bishop. He at once admitted the Lapsed to communion upon the production of a *libellus pacis*, and not content with this formal act of rebellion, proceeded to vilify Cyprian in the eyes of his diocese and of the whole church. When the persecution broke out Cyprian had gone into hiding ; it was probably a braver thing to retire and attempt to guide his harassed flock from his place of seclusion than to face certain death and leave them shepherdless ; but his action was capable of malicious misinterpretation. Novatus was not slow to use the weapon thus put into his hands. He wrote to Rome in such terms that the reply of a section of the church of Rome, to Cyprian personally, and to the Christians of Carthage at large, hinted broadly that their bishop was little better than an apostatizer himself. The

reply contained references to the parable of the Good Shepherd and the hireling who fled ; the implication was unmistakeable.

But Cyprian, unmoved by these attacks, summoned a council to Carthage as soon as opportunity occurred, and laid the whole question before his brother bishops. The decisions of the council are most important, and had far-reaching results on the subsequent life of the church. Cyprian had excommunicated Novatus and his friend Felicissimus, a rich layman, who had vigorously supported him in his contumacious action. The council upheld these excommunications, thus reasserting the authority of the bishop, and making rebellion against the chief pastors of the church more heinous and difficult. In the matter of the Lapsed, a view more lenient than was warranted by the previous practice of the church prevailed. Genuine apostatizers were to be absolved from their offence on their deathbed, if previously they had shown sufficient signs of penitence. The *Libellatici* (feigned apostatizers) presented a yet more difficult problem ; their sin was the graver since they had endeavoured by deceit to avoid the condemnation which they knew to be due. They needed special treatment, and in the end the council decided that each *Libellaticus* must be examined separately and set to perform a penance. If this was done and repentance seemed sincere, he too might be readmitted to communion on his deathbed ; but to the impenitent no hope was held out of pardon, even in the last extremity.

It will be seen at once that these decisions were a real advance in the treatment of ecclesiastical offenders. Already, in Rome, pardon could be obtained for sins against the seventh commandment, but no one had

hitherto supposed that the greatest of all sins, open denial of Christ, could be forgiven. It needed the Decian persecution, with its fierceness and the problems which it created, to teach the church that the mercy of God is no less than His justice.

It could not be expected that decisions, in one sense so revolutionary, would pass unchallenged, or be accepted without a struggle. From this point the story of the Lapsed is bound up with the Novatianist schism, and for that we must turn to Rome.

Fabian, bishop of Rome, had perished under Decius, on January 20, 250 A.D., and the see remained vacant for more than a year. When the first wave of persecution had passed and the Roman church set about appointing a successor to Fabian, two candidates were put forward. The one, Novatian, was a scholar of no mean repute, who had done much to control and guide the church during the vacancy, a rigorist, and opposed to Cyprian, though on personal rather than ecclesiastical grounds. The other, Cornelius, was reputed to have dealt gently with the Lapsed. Cornelius was elected, but Novatian's party refused to accept him and began a schism of their own with ' rigorism ' as their watchword. This took place in March, 251 A.D., about two months before the Council of Carthage, already described. When the decrees of that council were made known, and Novatus found himself still excommunicate, hardly believeable though it be, he, the champion of a still laxer policy, joined Novatian and the rigorists ! His dearest friends must have found it difficult to provide any reason for his action save that of personal spite against Cyprian, and a desire to overthrow the decrees of his council by any means in his power.

So Novatianism began as a protest against the growing

laxity of the church. Its influence in Carthage was almost negligible, but in Rome and the East it gained considerable support and flourished as a rival society—claiming to be itself the Catholic Church—for more than a hundred years. When the more personal elements of the dispute had faded from view, a new principle emerged, the necessity of maintaining the holiness of the church by the rigorous exclusion of all who failed to live up to the christian standard. The Novatianists began by refusing to receive back to communion those who, under great stress, had sacrificed to idols. They presently extended that principle to all guilty of mortal sin, as the Montanists had done, claiming apostolic authority for the practice. The Paraclete had said by Montanus, 'The church has power to forgive sins, but I will not do it lest men commit other sins.' The Novatianists finally declared that the church had no power at all to forgive mortal sin. Thus while the orthodox were learning more of the infinite nature of God's mercy, the Novatianists, in the words of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, were 'slandering our most compassionate Lord Jesus Christ as merciless.'

We need not follow the subsequent history of the sect, nor concern ourselves with its other divergences from Catholicism. Innocent I. (410-417) expelled it from Rome by closing all the Novatianist churches. Cyril of Alexandria (412-444) did the same in Egypt; but they were joined by the Montanists, and lingered on with them in Phrygia till the collapse of the joint schism in the seventh century.

The problem indicated by Christ in the parable of the tares growing amongst the wheat was not settled, however, by the decisions at Carthage in 251, nor by the subsequent

schism of Novatian and his new ally Novatus. It broke out with renewed vigour fifty years later. Donatism, to which we must now turn, was concerned in its origin entirely with this one question: How can the Church maintain her holiness whilst she shares her fellowship of good things with those unworthy of the privileges they receive at her hands?

DONATISM

The persecution begun by Diocletian in 303 A.D., the last, most thorough and universal, was the immediate cause of the Donatist dispute. Diocletian was not by nature a persecutor; during eighteen years of his reign Christians enjoyed full liberty of worship, and when at last he embarked upon a policy of repression he hoped to achieve his aim without bloodshed, but was overruled by Galerius, his colleague, and Caesar in charge of the Danube frontier, who was a bitter opponent of Christianity. In view of the dangers threatening the Empire —externally from the Persian and the Goth, internally from repeated plots against the Emperor's person—Diocletian became convinced that military absolutism was the only way to secure peace both at home and abroad. Mithra, god of the army and protector of the Emperor, who with him had shared the title of Invictus since the days of Commodus, and whose cult was intimately linked with emperor worship, was obviously the god whose favour should be sought and whose worship should be universally adopted. Hence the necessity to restrain, and if possible to abolish, the worship of Christ, his only serious rival. Yet it was not till 303 A.D. that Galerius was able to persuade Diocletian to take active measures to this end.

Between February 303 and March 304 A.D. four edicts

of increasing severity were issued, and the following are the most important points contained in them: (1) All Christian churches to be destroyed. (2) All sacred books to be given up to be burnt. (3) All Christians who refused to offer the accustomed libations to be deprived of civil rights. (4) Obstinate refusal to comply to be punished with slavery or death. Though these edicts were framed to include all Christians, they were specially directed against the clergy and Christians serving in the army. Doubtless the intention was to reduce the church to impotence by the removal of her leaders, and to compel the soldiers to fall into line with their pagan comrades.

As in the days of the Decian persecutions, the church was caught ill prepared to resist the attack, and though the prisons were soon filled with clergy and lay folk ('confessors' for the faith), there were many, as there had been fifty years before, who apostatized, or came to terms with the magistrates. Those who surrendered the sacred books and so escaped punishment were called 'Traditors,' and it was over the question of the position of these traditors that the Donatist quarrel broke out.

The question was acute in Carthage, where the bishop, Mensurius, was faced with the twofold task of restraining the eagerness for martyrdom which some of his flock displayed, by needlessly drawing attention to themselves, and of dealing wisely with those who had given up their copies of the scriptures and yet had not lapsed, or in some other way had earned the opprobrious title of Traditor. Mensurius was accused of being himself a traditor, but he explained that he had concealed the books and had left in their place, in one of his churches, some heretical writings which the authorities had destroyed without discovering the hoax he had played upon them. At the

same time some Christians, already under discipline for other offences, had seized upon the opportunity thus presented to rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of the church, and as ' confessors ' grew fat in prison upon the alms of the faithful.[1] Thus Mensurius was in the unenviable position of being himself to some extent under suspicion, of being out of sympathy with the zeal for martyrdom, and of being definitely in opposition to some of the confessors, whose action was certainly worthy of condemnation. Opposition to Mensurius soon began to make itself felt, and a faction grew up in Carthage under the leadership of Donatus, bishop of Casae Nigrae, in the neighbouring province of Numidia, which refused to have anything to do with Mensurius, or those who remained in communion with him.

The quarrel thus begun dragged on in an indeterminate kind of way, until the death of Mensurius, in 311, caused new complications to arise ; out of them the Donatist schism definitely took shape. Caecilian, who had been deacon to Mensurius and closely connected with him in the earlier stages of the dispute, was chosen to succeed him as bishop of Carthage and was duly consecrated, one of his consecrators being Felix of Aptunga, himself suspected of having been a traditor. The Donatist party refused to acknowledge Caecilian, and chose for themselves Marjorinus, whom Donatus and certain Numidian bishops consecrated. Thus the schism was complete, and two rival bishops claimed jurisdiction over the see of Carthage.

The battle of the Milvian Bridge in the spring of 313 A.D. and the death of Maxentius left Constantine sole Emperor of the West, and the edict of Milan, put forth

[1] Duchesne, *Early History of the Church*, vol. ii. p. 81.

by him in the same year, established Christianity as the favoured religion and the Emperor as its patron and protector. Eager to secure peace throughout his dominions, and conscious of the assistance which the church could give him towards this end, Constantine sent gifts of money to Caecilian for distribution among the poorer Christians of Carthage, ignoring the Donatist schismatics. Donatus and his party interpreted this action—as probably Constantine intended that they should—as a condemnation of their attitude, and of the division in the church for which they were responsible. But they determined to win the Emperor to their side, and appealed to him to appoint judges from Gaul to hear their case.

It is interesting to note that almost the first result of toleration was an invitation to the civil power to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs. There had been one previous appeal,[1] but that was an isolated case; the Donatists began the practice which became universal in subsequent years, and did not always redound to the credit of the church. Constantine listened to their appeal, and, flattered perhaps by their action, certainly desirous of peace, set himself to bring the dispute to an end. Three separate attempts were made to bring about a reconciliation, but on each occasion the Donatists refused to accept the decision of the tribunals which considered their complaint.

First the case was tried by a commission of bishops from Gaul and Italy, under the presidency of Melchiades, bishop of Rome This commission, after carefully sifting the charge brought against Caecilian, acquitted him and suggested that as there were two rival bishops, he who

[1] To the Emperor Aurelian in a dispute at Antioch in which questions of property were involved, 271 A.D.

had been first consecrated should be acknowledged as the lawful possessor of the see. The suggestion was not acceptable to the Donatists, and again they appealed to Constantine. He was still reluctant to take the case into his own court, preferring that it should be settled by ecclesiastical judges if possible. So he summoned a council to meet at Arles [1] in 314 A.D., to hear the case. Donatus and his party alienated the sympathy of the council at once by their insolence and overbearing manner; a letter written to Pope Sylvester from Arles speaks of them as 'men of unruly mind, injurious to the law and custom of the Church.' This violence of temper is noticeable throughout the dispute, and became yet more marked later, as we shall see. The bishops at Arles confirmed the decision of Melchiades that Caecilian was the legal bishop of Carthage, adding that even if one of his consecrators had been a traditor, the consecration would still be valid. They also spoke in stern reproof of the unscrupulous way in which the accusation of 'Traditor' was laid against numbers of the clergy, refusing to consider such charges unless they could be supported by documentary evidence.

Such statements were hardly likely to conciliate Donatus, and once more he appealed to Constantine, who, angry at his obstinacy, called the case to his own court at Rome, whence later he removed it to Milan. After most patient investigation, Felix of Aptunga, round whom at the moment the controversy centred, was cleared from the accusation of having been a traditor, and the Emperor formally declared that Caecilian was to be recognized as bishop. This decree was issued in 316 A.D. and com-

[1] The first mention of the British church is in connection with this Council. See chap. iii. p. 69.

municated to the Vicarius (the civil governor) of Africa immediately.

Still the Donatists refused to submit ; they had appealed to the Emperor and he had heard their appeal, treating them with unusual patience ; they could expect no further clemency ; indeed stern measures were adopted to compel them to obey his ruling. Their churches were taken from them by force and soldiers were called out to suppress the rioting which ensued. But nothing was able to weaken their resistance, and Constantine, probably realizing that the appearance of martyrdom which repressive measures gave them, only encouraged their obduracy, decided to leave them alone.

The subsequent history of the schism is deplorable. Their claim to be the Catholic Church was denied ; their zeal for martyrdom could find no outlet since the civil power tolerated their existence ; and their previous history, and the Punic temperament made them unable to accept the situation. Open, violent opposition was the essence of their life, and it was not difficult in Africa, where there were large estates farmed by slaves, to find opportunity to stir up civil strife. Runaway slaves and malcontents of all kinds joined them, and there was a danger of the movement developing into a slave rising. Bands of Donatists used to lurk round cottages at night armed with clubs. Sometimes they would attack travellers on the open road asking them to kill them, in order that they might obtain the glory of a martyr's death. If the traveller refused to comply with this most unusual request, they probably killed him instead. They were called 'Circumcelliones,' from their habit of lurking round dwelling-places, and were a terror to peaceful citizens over a wide area. Constans took severe measures against them

in 348 A.D., putting to death or banishing the leaders and proscribing their worship. With the revival of Paganism under Julian the Apostate (361-364), they gained a new lease of life and continued their anti-social, anti-catholic campaign till Augustine, the last and greatest bishop of Hippo, supported the Emperor in severe measures to secure their repression.

At first Augustine endeavoured to win them over by reason, dealing carefully with the problem which lay at the root of the trouble, the presence of tares amongst the wheat, which in the opinion of the Donatists vitiated the claim of the orthodox to be the church of Christ. Unhappily, they refused to listen to his arguments or to discuss possible solutions of the difficulty, and Augustine reluctantly appealed to the Emperor Honorius to interfere. Honorius compelled their leaders to take part in a disputation with the Catholics, led by Augustine, in 411 A.D., and after hearing both sides, decided in favour of the orthodox and proceeded to enforce his decision. Fresh enactments were made against them; in 412 all who professed themselves to be Donatists were punished by the imposition of fines; in 414 they were deprived of civil rights; and in 415 the death penalty was decreed against the holders of Donatist meetings. These decrees had the desired result and the movement soon collapsed, most of the schismatics coming back to the church.

But the methods used to secure their reconciliation reflect little credit upon the church's leaders. It is true that they had been involved in grave social disorder, and the Emperor might well treat them as civil offenders and impose penalties suitable to their guilt. But that cannot justify Augustine and his brother bishops in using the power of the civil authority to coerce recalcitrant schis-

matics, and not even protesting against the death penalty. The church of later days was not slow to profit by the example thus given ; the work of the Inquisition throughout Europe, and in England, the issue of a writ *De Haeretico Comburendo* could be justified by the ecclesiastical policy towards the Donatists in the fifth century.

The history of Donatism is in many ways most instructive. It was the last serious attempt for many years, to overthrow the authority of the orthodox episcopate, and its failure shows how completely that episcopate had established itself by the fourth century ; it shows also how hopeless a task it was to tilt against the power of a united church.

The conscience of the early church was offended at the spectacle of two rival bishops claiming jurisdiction in the same see. No one would doubt the right of Donatus and his party to raise the question of the position of the traditors ; but his appointment of a rival to Caecilian, and still more, his refusal to obey the decisions of both ecclesiastical and civil tribunals, definitely placed him in the wrong, and alienated sober opinion. The day had not yet dawned when churchmen could view with complacency the prospect of two or even three bishops in one place, claiming to speak with the authority of the church, on behalf of God, to His people.

Again the appeal to Constantine is important. His gift of money to Caecilian was no doubt a political move and intended as a tacit condemnation of Donatus. The Emperor was rightly concerned to secure peace in his dominions ; it is hardly likely, however, that he would have interfered in a dispute, so exclusively ecclesiastical in its early stages, had he not been invited to do so by one of the parties. In any case, the example of the schis-

matics was followed by the orthodox, with disastrous results. Imperial interference in the subsequent life of the church seldom bore good fruit ; the Arian controversy has been described as a ' Court Intrigue,' and though the statement needs considerable qualification, there is some truth in it. Augustine's appeal to Honorius in 411 A.D., nearly a century after Constantine's share in the struggle, achieved the end he desired, but it showed that the church was prepared to use the very weapons of its own persecutors, and consent to the application of the death penalty to recalcitrants from its fold, just as the pagan world had punished the Christians with death in the first three centuries.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

It is noteworthy that not one of these three schisms was able to secure the surrender of the church to its demands. Though all of them resulted in a modification of orthodox practice in the matters in which they joined issue, yet in each case the orthodox gained the victory, and the schismatics were either reabsorbed into the church or became identified with eccentric and sometimes anti-social movements. Political considerations entered into the Donatist struggle which sufficiently account for the Emperor's support of Catholicism, and therefore, for the ultimate triumph of the church in that matter. But Montanism and Novatianism both arose when Christianity was still a *religio illicita*, and had to be faced and answered with the aid of no other authority than that of the church's own leaders. The only explanation which seems to account at all adequately for the triumph of orthodoxy is that the episcopate had established itself as the final court of appeal, and that the authority of the individual bishop in his own

diocese was too strong to be overthrown by the time these problems became urgent.

A SPECIMEN LIBELLUS. (See p. 135.)

The following Libellus of the Decian Persecution is taken from Professor Gwatkins's *Selections from Early Christian Writers*.

To the officers in charge of the sacrifices of the village of Alexander's Isle, from Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabus, of the village of Alexander's Isle, aged about 72, with a scar on his right eyebrow. I have always sacrificed to the gods ; and now in your presence, according to the commands, I have sacrificed and made a libation and tasted of the victims ; and I desire you to subscribe. Fare ye well.

I, Aurelius Diogenes have delivered this . . . .

I, Mys . . . the son of . . . (saw him) sacrificing, and have subscribed.

In the first year of Imperator Caesar Caius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, on Epiphi 2 (*i.e.* June 26, 250).

(The dots indicate missing letters.)

CHAPTER VII

SPECULATION BEFORE 325 A.D.

THE GNOSTICS: MARCION: THE SCHOOLS OF ALEXANDRIA AND ANTIOCH

From its inception Christianity has claimed to be the religion of the 'plain man.' Few, if any, religious teachers have spoken with the simplicity and directness of Jesus of Nazareth; He expounded the mysteries of God in a language almost rude in its freedom from artifice or subtlety of phrase. So also, the earliest preachers of the gospel used no turn of rhetoric when delivering their message. The sermons of St. Peter, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, are marked with the blunt sincerity of an untutored fisherman; and St. Paul, after his failure with the philosophers at Athens, determined to 'know nothing' among his converts 'save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' This is still further evidenced by the early literary opponents of Christianity, who continually refer to the fact that only the uneducated could be won over to the new faith, and that it was not worth the attention of the philosophers.

Yet as time went on and learned members of society began to join the church—prominent Stoic teachers such as Justin Martyr, or Pantaenus, 'the true Sicilian bee,' as Clement of Alexandria calls him—men began to under-

stand that, for all its outward simplicity, Christianity brought a message no less profoundly important to the wise than welcome to the simple. So within and without the Christian body men began to speculate about the implications of the gospel story and the claims made by its protagonists, and these speculations were of the utmost value to the church. It is true that sometimes they brought with them dangers and difficulties which caused heart searchings and dissensions, even to the point of schism ; but it enabled the leaders of the church to work out a system of theology, to test the worth of their suppositions both in doctrine and morals, and to present a reasoned answer to the critic, so that finally men of learning, no less than humble and uneducated tradesmen, could be convinced that God had spoken through Christ.

THE GNOSTICS

Gnosticism does not strictly come under the heading of Christian speculation. It is rather a system of thought, or a collection of religious ideas, drawn chiefly from Oriental sources, and older than Christianity. In general the Gnostics added the redemptive work of Christ to their religious theories ; it is more accurate, therefore, to think of Gnosticism as a pagan religious philosophy endeavouring to capture the church than as a disorder arising from within the Christian fold. But its tenets found their way into the church, and were welcomed and encouraged by some outstanding champions among those professing Christianity. So, though it was older than the church and originated in quite other realms of thought, Gnosticism became so closely identified with it in some places as to give the appearance of having risen out of the gospel revelation.

Its theories were derived in part from Hellenic philosophy—Plato and the Stoics—in part from Jewish superstitions, in part from pagan notions about the creation of the world which have their origin in Syria, and in part from the astrology and magic which have always been associated with Babylon and the land of the Chaldees. To this was added, as the Gnostics came into contact with them, such elements of Christian teaching as were convenient, or helped to make their theories more coherent or acceptable. The result of such a fusion of ideas, some of them mutually antagonistic, is almost incapable of accurate analysis: indeed the Gnostics were divided into a great number of sects holding different opinions on this or that particular theory. No attempt will be made, in what follows, to describe in detail the varying points of view of these sects; it will be sufficient for our purpose to show the broad outlines of Christian Gnostic teaching, the problems which faced it and the solutions generally offered, and to take some account of its bearing upon orthodox Christianity. The middle of the second century is the period of its greatest influence upon the church, though it was beginning to make itself felt before the close of the apostolic age. It was largely because of its influence that the Christian catechetical school was founded at Alexandria about 180 A.D., and the church may be grateful to Gnosticism for this fact; it is hardly too much to say that the school of Alexandria saved orthodox Christianity for the world of later days.

The problem of the origin and existence of evil lies at the root of all Christian Gnostic speculation. Briefly stated it is this: How can the presence of evil be reconciled with belief in an all holy God: and how can the world, which manifestly contains evil, have been created

by this God, Who, it is believed, presides over and directs the operations of the world which He has brought into being? To the Gnostic, matter was evil in its essence, and there is much in the natural world to lend colour to his belief: Nature is 'red in tooth and claw'; pain and sickness, both hindrances to progress, are hard to reconcile with a beneficent Creator, nor can their value to the soul be easily recognized, or, often, perceived at all; man most obviously, if not most frequently, falls into error through the weakness or corruption of his physical nature. The flesh seems to hold down the spirit in a bondage which is at once intolerable and irresistible. Matter, then, seems to be essentially evil, and, said the Gnostic, since the supreme God is all holy, what part can He have had in the creation of the world?

It seemed so impossible that the supreme God should be responsible for the world of matter with all its evil, that the line of escape most usually followed was to separate the supreme or 'Father-God' from the creator of this world. The God of the Old Testament, in Hebrew language Jahweh, had created the world, but he did not know the Father God, the supreme first cause of all life. This supreme God was immeasurably above and beyond the creator of this world, unknown, and, as some sects maintained, unknowable by him. Between the Father God and the created world there was a long line of beings, all of them in some way emanations from the true God—not without resemblance to the Jewish belief in angels—but some of them, at all events, had no knowledge of Him to Whom, in origin, they owed their existence. At some time there occurred a disaster out of which the world was created; one of these emanations, commonly called the Demiurge, became entangled with matter, and the visible

world was the result. The Jews, so the Gnostics believed, worshipped this lower emanation, the creator or fashioner of this world, believing him to be the true God, and the whole world was in ignorance of the far removed, supreme, entirely holy God, till Jesus Christ proceeded from Him and enlightened men's minds.

At this point the reason for the title *Gnosticism* becomes clear. Knowledge (γνῶσις) of this supreme God was the aim of the intellectuals; through it alone could release be found from the trammels of the material order; and Jesus Christ came to provide this γνῶσις. His teaching was of two kinds: He was content to give instruction upon the practical conduct of everyday life to the uneducated and middle-class type of His disciples; but to a few selected ones He taught in secret the mysteries of that Being from Whose side He had come forth, that they, through knowledge thus obtained, might return to the one pure source of all life. Although humanity sprang immediately from the Demiurge, there were elements in it capable of liberation from matter, since in origin all life came from the Father-God. But this liberation came through knowledge alone; Jesus Christ, therefore, came to redeem men's minds, and to deliver them, through knowledge, from the prison house of creation. Those who seek this redemption are Gnostics, their religious system is Gnosticism.

But a difficulty arose at once about the person of Christ. The apostles had taught that He had taken human flesh, and had lived the common life of man, being no less truly Son of Man than Son of God. It was intolerable to the Gnostic that He who proceeded directly from the Father-God should have become identified with matter in such a way that He was truly man, enduring all the limitations

of humanity and suffering upon the cross in His flesh. Two answers were found for this difficulty : the one was that the Incarnation could not be a true union between God and man—it was unthinkable that deity should be allied with matter—and therefore the gospel story was explained to mean that there was only a moral union, and that transitory, between the divine emanation—the Christ —and the human person, the son of Joseph and Mary. The other answer was that there was no union of any kind. This divine emanation clothed Himself with the semblance of humanity, as the most convenient vehicle of expression, but there was no material reality of substance in the fleshly clothing which He assumed. This second solution is known as Docetic Gnosticism (*δόκησις*, an appearance or phantom), and lay at the root of much Christological speculation in the fourth and fifth centuries. Thus Christ's human life was emptied of much of its meaning ; the Passion was unreal, since redemption was of the mind not of the body, and the resurrection was unnecessary and impossible, since the intellectuals are to be entirely freed from the flesh, and to return to the life of pure spirit with the Father-God.

However much man may try to escape from it, he is compelled by circumstances entirely beyond his control to live in this world under the limitations of his physical nature. Man in the body must live the life of man, in company with his fellows, and must conform to certain customs (*mores*), if only to make this life less intolerable. Some *modus vivendi* had to be provided, therefore, in the moral sphere, and here again two solutions were offered. Some Gnostic sects taught that the body must be rigorously repressed ; it was so evil that in every possible way it must be denied expression or development. By no means

could it ever be redeemed, its evil was original and beyond the power of good ; only by the most rigid asceticism could the spirit hope to rise superior to its earthly surroundings. This point of view is essentially Oriental, and has much in common with the teachings of Mani the Persian, and founder of the Manichaeans. Those among the Gnostics who favoured this solution, lived a life of great austerity, of stern moral purpose, forbidding marriage, the use of flesh and wine, and indeed any gratification of the senses. As might be expected, they attracted to themselves the Montanists—though primarily these were in revolt against the intellectual side of Gnosticism—and all Christians who felt that the church was in danger of making too easy a compromise with the world.

Others found a satisfactory solution in a contrary direction. They argued that the soul of man was the important part of him, the body counted not at all ; so all the physical appetites could be indulged with impunity. These had no moral significance, they could not injure the soul which, though dwelling within the body, was not concerned with that body's behaviour ; so the grossest immoralities accompanied this teaching. But it is only fair to say that this point of view was not acceptable to men of the standing of Valentinus, a Christian Gnostic of high moral character, who worked out a philosophy of considerable nobility, and whose sect was probably the largest among the Gnostics. Nevertheless, the fact that such a solution was possible shows how grave is the danger when matter is regarded as evil and outside the life of God.

Gnosticism was a philosophy rather than a religion. Like Neo-Platonism which flourished under Plotinus and Porphyry in the next century, and was the last serious

attempt of Greek philosophy to solve the mystery of the world, it could make no appeal to the simple and uneducated. It was concerned with thought rather than action : knowledge, in the sense of highly specialized learning, was the key to redemption ; indeed, it was doubtful whether redemption was possible at all to those of inferior intellectual calibre, though some believed that the possession of faith might, by itself, gain salvation for men after a long time of probation.

By a denial of the reality of His Manhood much of the attractiveness of Christ's life, and of its power, was destroyed. Simple men will not follow a phantom, and it is no comfort to them to be told to look beyond the ' seeming ' to a Father-God infinitely removed from their apprehension. Nor was the esoteric nature of their teaching likely to inspire confidence in the minds of any but those who were already familiar with the idea of the hidden mysteries of the initiates in the Eastern cults. The claims of Christ were stupendous, the mystery of deity and humanity residing within one Person needed the most profound consideration ; but the unknown, or even unknowable, God of the Gnostics, and their Christ with a phantom body, living an unreal human life, could not appeal to the practical common-sense of those who had already accepted Christianity as it had been delivered to them by the apostles and their successors. It attracted some among the learned, and notably Marcion, but it could never hope to win the church to itself. Its influence upon Christian thought, especially in relation to the person of Christ, lasted on, and indeed has never completely disappeared ; but it had ceased to have any practical bearing upon Christian everyday life, with the exception of the Marcionites, before the edict of toleration.

MARCION

Marcion is by far the most interesting of the Gnostics, as he is, in some respects, of all the early heretics. He came from Sinope, on the Black Sea, where he was a successful merchant seaman, and appeared first in Rome about 140 A.D. He was an earnest and devout Christian, and there is no reason to accept the stories invented by a later age, which cast aspersions upon his moral life and so discredited his teaching. Nor is it strictly accurate to number him among the Gnostics ; there are elements of Gnosticism in his theories, and some of his tenets led up to Gnosticism, though their roots lay in other soil. But he was practical in outlook and was concerned more with the life of men than with philosophic speculation. He founded a church, not a school, of speculative thought, and laid emphasis on the need of faith, ignoring in great measure the claims of γνῶσις.

He was greatly impressed by the contrast between the God of the Old Testament, a stern, cruel and capricious God, as it seemed to him, and the God of love revealed in the gospel through the person of Christ. He believed that Jahweh was the creator of the world, or at least he had fashioned it ; but, like the other Gnostics, he taught that above Jahweh was the One, Supreme, perfect beyond all thought. This Supreme God was unknown to men until suddenly, in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, the Son of God came down in the likeness of man, to reveal this unknown Father-God to the world. He came in the likeness of man, but this likeness was only apparent, not real. He was not born, but appeared as a full-grown man. He was not the Messiah expected by the Jews, for that man was to be a great military captain, leading the chosen people

to world conquest and temporal dominion; but Christ came to teach men love and harmony, to show them how to discipline their souls by asceticism, and Himself to suffer for their sins.

St. Paul was his great master. In many of his epistles, but more particularly when writing to the Romans, St. Paul had emphasized the antithesis between the Law and the Gospel, Righteousness and Grace, the covenant with Abraham and the new covenant through the blood of Christ. Further, he was the apostle who pre-eminently had championed the Gentiles against those Judaizers who would have compelled all Gentile converts to accept the law of Moses in its totality. In all this Marcion thought that he saw the rejection by Paul of the Old Testament and its God, and of the very principle upon which the church had based her life, namely, that the Jews were the chosen instrument through whom He would bring about the salvation of mankind.

Thus he was led to reject the Old Testament entirely, and there was but little in the New Testament which he felt able to accept. Of the gospels he retained only that of St. Luke, as being most Pauline, and even this he edited, cutting out the first two chapters and all passages which suggest any connection between Christ and nature. The fourth gospel, the epistle to the Hebrews, and the Apocalypse met with his special condemnation. His Bible consisted of 'the Gospel,' *i.e.* the edited copy of St. Luke, and 'the Apostle,' which contained ten of St. Paul's epistles, though even here he found some editing to be necessary. Tertullian says that he criticized the New Testament with a penknife, and the description is most apt, for he excised all passages which were not in harmony with his own teaching. He believed that St.

Paul was the only apostle who had understood Christ and that God had called him for this one purpose, that he might correct the erroneous ideas about Christ which were fostered by the original eleven. So when Marcion found passages in St. Paul's writings which seemed to praise the Creator (whom he rejected), he said that they were interpolations by a later hand, and not the work of his great master.

He made strenuous efforts to win the church in Rome to his opinions, but they were subversive of almost all that the Church held most dear, and he failed, as he was bound to do, since the true humanity of Christ, the continuity of revelation from Abraham to our Lord, and the doctrine of the Incarnation, set forth as it was believed, by St. John in the fourth gospel, could not be rejected without destroying the very foundations of Christianity. In the end he was expelled from the church (about 144 A.D.) and formed a Marcionite sect of his own, which was most active and spread through Christendom, lasting for some centuries. It is said that he repented and sought readmission to the church, which was promised to him if first he had been able to win back those whom he had drawn away from orthodoxy ; but he died before he was able to fulfil the conditions of his penance.

There is much that is interesting about Marcion, chiefly perhaps in connection with his difficulty about the Old Testament, a difficulty which many in all ages have shared with him. At first sight there is much to occasion doubt or dissatisfaction. The nature and purpose of God, as declared by various writers, is conflicting, inconsistent, and sometimes frankly unworthy. Allegorization of difficult passages was the method of escape most commonly used. But the early church, holding fast to the theme of

the Epistles to the Hebrews, perceived, albeit but dimly and confusedly, that the revelation of God is progressive; that He had spoken to men only as they had been able to bear and to understand the message; and that in Christ was to be found the culmination and completion of all the previous partial and inadequate revelations of God. Marcion was driven to reject the Old Testament as being irreconcilable with the revelation of God in Christ; the Christian writers used it to show how πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως (Heb. 1. i.) God was preparing the Jewish world for the final revelation of Himself through His Son.

On the practical side Marcion failed to win the church because he could not believe in the possibility of salvation for all men. The Supreme Good, he said, never punishes, but He leaves men of carnal mind and debased life to the cruel treatment of the creator of this world, and makes no effort to win them unless they turn to Him. Here he is in direct opposition to St. Paul, who laid stress on the desire of God that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Marcion could not believe this, though he was unable to say why it was not true. But the hope of salvation, which was the constant message of the apostles, had laid firm hold upon the imagination of the second century Christians; they could not easily be persuaded to abandon their hope or to follow the gloomy doctrine of predestination, which was implicit in Marcionism, and was manifest in the Calvinism of a later day.

THE CHURCH AND GNOSTICISM

There was little likelihood that the church as a whole would accept the philosophy of the Gnostics, or the bowdlerized Christianity of Marcion. It was recognized almost at once that such doctrines cut at the root of the

gospel message, and that there could be no compromise between Gnosticism and Orthodoxy. It was perhaps the sense of how fundamental were the issues involved which caused the champions of Catholicism to use such harsh language of their opponents. Polycarp, the story of whose martyrdom is one of the most noble of all the martyrologies, spoke of Marcion as 'the first born of Satan.' Such an appellation is most unjust and unwarranted. But it shows how keenly men who were imbued with the spirit of St. John felt about this new and dangerous teaching. There was no formal schism, except that of the Marcionites; as it became clear that the Gnostics could not win over the church, they either left her fold or forsook their heresy. But for some time they carried on a most active literary campaign. They were busy promoting their opinions by the aid of the pen at the same time as the literary opposition from pagans, described in a previous chapter (pp. 87-94), began to make itself felt. So the Apologists were concerned to refute, not only the pagan philosophers from without, but the semi-pagan, semi-christian philosophers from within. All of them lay stress upon the same points, and these are well summarized in 'The Shepherd of Hermas' (a document usually dated *c.* 140 A.D.). First: the Creator of this world is the one only God. 'Before all things,' says Hermas, 'believe that God is one, that He has created and formed all things, and called them into existence out of nothing, and that in Him all things are contained.' In the second place, they all emphasize the unity of man's nature, that body and soul are interrelated, and that the deeds of the flesh influence the soul of man. 'Take heed,' says the Shepherd, 'never to allow the thought in thy heart that this flesh of thine perishes, and never allow it

to be stained with sin. If thou defile thy flesh, thou defilest also the Holy Spirit ; and if thou defile the Holy Spirit, thou shalt not live.' [1]

The line of defence which Irenaeus adopted is particularly interesting, since it sheds light upon the growth of the idea of authority in the early church. He relies on three separate arguments against the Gnostics—the writings of the Apostles, the ' traditions,' and the living voice of the church's rulers. Among the writings he mentions the four gospels, the Apocalypse, the first epistles of St. Peter and St. John, and some uncanonical books ; but Tertullian, taking up the same idea a little later, refers to the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen epistles of St. Paul, some of the Catholic epistles, and the Revelation of St. John. The significance of these references to scripture is twofold ; it shows how important were the scriptures in the eyes of the early church as a ground of appeal in disputed points ; and further, it is clear, in the case of Tertullian, that the Canon of the New Testament (*i.e.* the list of books which were regarded as authoritative) was practically established by the time he wrote, and that the books quoted were already received without question by the church as a whole.

Irenaeus appeals to ' Tradition,' because he says that his opponents will reject the writings—as Marcion did—and say that the apostles delivered a secret teaching, the essence of the gospel, by word of mouth. There was, he frankly admits, an oral teaching, but it was not secret, it was publicly taught, and it was handed down in a readily remembered form of words : ' The Church . . . has received from the apostles and their disciples, the faith

[1] These quotations from ' The Shepherd ' are taken from Duchesne, *The Early History of the Church*, vol. i. p. 137.

in one God, Father Almighty, Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea . . . and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, Who became flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, Who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensation of God ; and the advents, and the birth from the virgin, and the passion and resurrection from the dead, and the ascension in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus Our Lord, and the coming from heaven in the glory of His Father, to restore all things and to raise all human flesh . . . This preaching and this faith the Church . . . guards carefully.' [1] He is apparently referring to and quoting some credal statement which was the basis of the oral tradition handed down by the apostles to their successors, known and received by all Christians, and used by them as a kind of plumbline of orthodoxy.

His third line of defence is still more interesting. If the adversary will not receive the writings, and rejects the traditions, the final appeal is to the living voice of the church's rulers. 'We ought to obey those elders,' he says, 'who are in the Church, those who, as we have shown, have their succession from the apostles, and who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received a sure gift of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father.' To Irenaeus, as to Ignatius sixty years earlier, the test of truth was to be found in the agreement of the episcopate concerning the point in question, and the authority of the episcopate in doctrinal disputes was to be regarded as final and absolute.

The interest of the answers of Irenaeus for later days lies in the conception of the church which he lays before his Gnostic opponents. The apostolic writings, the apostolic tradition, and the apostolic voice, still heard in

[1] Irenaeus, *Haer.* i. x. (compressed).

the successors of the apostles, constitute for him the whole authority of the Catholic Church ; in modern language, the Bible, the creeds, and the ministry. And further, it is interesting, because it was undoubtedly the pressure of Gnostic opinions which compelled the church to declare what were and what were not to be regarded as the authoritative scriptures of the New Testament, to think out and formulate her doctrinal statements in credal form (though this belongs rather to the fourth than the second century), and to assert the claims of the episcopate. It has already been noticed that Montanism was partly a protest against the growing power of the bishops ; it was the Gnostic attack upon orthodoxy which stimulated that growth, and called forth the opposition of Montanus and his followers.

The chief complaint laid against the church in the century and a half which lies between Irenaeus and Athanasius (*c.* 175-325), was that the simplicity and freedom of apostolic days had given place to complex organization and intolerable rigidity. Such complaints were exaggerated, and sufficient allowance was not made for changes and developments, which were inevitable as Christianity spread in ever-widening circles within the one great Empire. But these charges were due in less measure to geographical expansion than to the challenge of Gnosticism. The church passed through a tremendous crisis between 150 and 200 A.D. : historic Christianity was at stake, and the times demanded stern measures and definite and authoritative statements. Out of the furnace of controversy there emerged the canon of the New Testament, the basis of a creed, and episcopal government everywhere established. It may be urged that the standard of orthodoxy and the system of govern-

ment thus set up was inelastic, and transgressed beyond the limits of legitimate development from the infant church of Jerusalem, as it appeared on the day of Pentecost. But Gnosticism was by no means the last of the doctrinal struggles.

In the fourth century the church was fighting, as it were, with her back to the wall to preserve the truth of the perfect humanity and perfect divinity of Christ; the Gnostic struggle in great measure prepared her for that stern contest. Indeed, it is difficult to see how she would have won through to the triumph of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., unless she had built up for herself that organization, which she maintained without serious opposition, from the end of the second to the middle of the sixteenth century.

THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA: CLEMENT: ORIGEN

The need for Christian schools of instruction was scarcely felt until the rise of Gnosticism compelled Christians to think out their doctrinal position in relation to the pagan philosophies round about them. Catechetical schools had been a regular institution among the educated classes for some centuries; but Christians were slow to follow the example of their neighbours, perhaps because they came to teach men a revealed religion, not a philosophy of life. So the need for such schools did not appear until the pagan philosophers themselves began to be interested in the church, and some Christians, imbued with semi-pagan theories, tried to model the doctrines of the church after their own plan.

The cosmopolitan nature of the city of Alexandria, and its importance as a seat of learning, has already been described; if Christian schools were to be established at

all, it was inevitable that one of them should be founded there. Two of the most prominent Gnostic teachers, Basilides and Valentinus, had spent some time teaching in the city, and Ammonius Saccas, the prophet of Neo-Platonism, was lecturing there towards the end of the second century; so a Christian school was founded, perhaps as a challenge to pagan learning. The date of its origin is uncertain, nor can we say positively who was its founder. Most probably Pantaenus was its first head; he was a converted Stoic philosopher, perhaps a Sicilian by birth, for Clement, his great pupil, calls him 'the true Sicilian bee.' This may, however, be no more than a delicate compliment to his teaching, since the honey of the bees of Sicily was so much prized. Clement succeeded him as head of the school about 200 A.D., and it is due to Clement that the school became so famous.

Clement [1] was born of heathen parents about 150 A.D. and had travelled extensively in Italy, Greece, and the East, seeking for that knowledge which he says he found at last, at the feet of Pantaenus. After his conversion he settled down at Alexandria, living the uneventful life of a student, lecturing and writing in defence of Christianity, till he was compelled to fly for his life during the persecution of Septimius Severus in 202 A.D. He went to Palestine, where we hear of him living in Jerusalem about 211, but no further details of his life are available.

He knew the dangers which sprang from the Gnostic heresy, but he realized also that the preachers of 'faith only, bare faith' [2] could never hope to win the intellectual world to Christ; so he set about to reconcile faith and knowledge, to show that through Christ all knowledge is

[1] There is a most attractive chapter on Clement in Glover, *op. cit.*

[2] *Stromateis* (Miscellanies), i. 43, 1.

hallowed, and in Him is the well-spring of wisdom. Like Justin Martyr, he reverenced the philosophy of the old Greek teachers, for he believed that they had been used by God as vehicles, in part, of His self-revelation. Christians who are afraid of philosophy are 'like children who are afraid of ghosts.' God made a covenant of philosophy with the Greeks, and one line of approach to the God and Father of all is to be found in their writings. But knowledge had a wider meaning for him than pure intellectualism: there was need for that side of knowledge, but it is only one part of the whole. 'The foundation of knowledge is to have no doubts about God, but to believe. Christ is both foundation and superstructure alike, by Him is the beginning and the end. . . . These, I mean faith and love, are not matters of teaching.'[1]

Thus to Clement, knowledge must rest on faith—this was the outcome of his own experience of conversion—and there can be no true wisdom without piety. So he links up the world of thought with practical everyday life, and has as wide a sympathy for the uneducated whose understanding of Christianity is most rudimentary, as for the wise, who can probe the deep mysteries of God. He was suspected of Gnostic tendencies, and perhaps in his anxiety to reconcile all that was best in pagan thought with Christianity, so that philosophers could accept the new teaching, he erred to some extent in their favour. But his close association between knowledge and practical life, in such a way that all, both wise and foolish, can share in the fullness of Christ, is very far removed from the Gnostic doctrine of the *illuminati*.

It has been pointed out by a distinguished writer[2]

[1] *Stromateis* (Miscellanies), vii. 55.

[2] Glover, *Conflict of Religions*.

that Clement had three battles to fight. (1) The battle of education within the church: to show that education counts, and philosophy is inevitable and of supreme value in refuting error. (2) To show that at its best philosophy is the foe of superstition, the champion of God's unity, and a preparation for the gospel. (3) To restate the Christian position in the language of philosophy, and to show that the gospel is the final philosophy of the universe, the solution of all the problems of existence, and the revelation of the ultimate mind of God. By his efforts to maintain these three principles, Clement set the tone of the Alexandrine school, so that through all its subsequent history, its aim and its chief contribution to christian thought can be summed up under these heads. All the great pupils of the school, Origen, Dionysius the Great, Athanasius and Cyril, were essentially Greek in outlook; they laid stress upon the mystical side of Christianity and the hidden work of the Logos, the Word and Wisdom of God, before He was revealed to men as the true Light which lighteth every man coming into the world, in the person of Christ. So when the great question of Christ's Godhead had to be thrashed out in the fourth century, it was the school of Alexandria which contributed the formula 'Of one substance with the Father,' which saved the catholic belief in the divinity of Christ.

Origen, who succeeded Clement as head of the school, is more famous, though perhaps not so attractive personally, as his great predecessor and teacher. The influence of his writings was unrivalled in the East for many centuries, and no one in the West can properly be compared to him in this respect, except Augustine.

He was born at Alexandria, of Christian parents, in 185 A.D. and showed such intellectual promise that

Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, appointed him to be head of the catechetical school before he was eighteen years of age. He fled to Caesarea during a persecution in his native city in 215 A.D., and was there ordained by the bishop of Jerusalem in 231 A.D. This occasioned a quarrel between the bishops of Alexandria and Jerusalem, for, by the custom of the church, then prevailing, a man could only be ordained by his own bishop (who in this case would have been Demetrius). The question was still further complicated, because, in his zeal for holiness, Origen had interpreted certain words of Christ (Matt. xix. 12) literally, and had mutilated himself; all such had been excluded from the priesthood. The church of Alexandria forbade him to teach in the city, and later, deposed him from the priesthood; but the Palestinian Christians refused to accept the deposition, and Origen founded a school and library in Caesarea, and was justly held in the highest esteem for his learning.

A discussion of his theological opinions would be beyond the scope and purpose of this book; we cannot do more than indicate his chief line of thought and the contribution he made to Christian dogma. He was a most prolific writer (Epiphanius says that he produced 6,000 books); but his best-known works are the *Hexapla*, an edition of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible in six parallel columns; a defence of Christianity in *Contra Celsum*; and a treatise on christian dogma which he called *De Principiis*.

The *Hexapla* was the first serious attempt at textual criticism. Origen hoped, by a comparison of the best-known versions, to arrive at the most authentic text of the Old Testament, and in this he was far in advance of his day. In *Contra Celsum* he answers in detail the

charges which Celsus had brought against Christianity in his *True Word against Christians*; and though the *True Word* is lost, Origen's reply is so careful that it has been possible to reconstruct the argument Celsus used, and even to reproduce his language, from Origen's answer. The *De Principiis*, which only exists in Latin translations and a few Greek fragments, is a formal theological treatise, in which he deals with the Being of God, the creation of the world, man's free will and the atonement, and his own method of biblical interpretation. A fierce controversy broke out over the theories set forth in the *De Principiis* one hundred years after his death. Origen was accused of minimizing the Godhead of Christ, and of carrying his method of allegorical interpretation of Scripture beyond reasonable limits. There was considerable truth in the charges; but it must be remembered that Origen wrote two generations before the Council of Nicaea, and a further period of nearly sixty years elapsed before the formal statements of the creed put out at that council was accepted by the whole church. The doctrine of the person of Christ and of His relation to the Father was still being thought out; it was loose and unformulated when Origen wrote. He had none of the advantages of his traducers, who could in great measure test his statements by the plumbline of oecumenical decisions. It is not surprising to find that he is to some extent confused and falls short of a later standard of orthodoxy. Pioneers are commonly discredited by those who march, breast-high, along the road which they have toiled to make, and over which they have stumbled with bleeding feet. Origen shares at once the glory and the shame which has been the lot of adventurous minds in all ages.

The eternal generation of the Logos is Origen's chief contribution to catholic theology. The following is the substance of his teaching about the Logos, and it had tremendous influence in the controversies of the next century. God is One, Immutable, Good; because of His goodness He reveals and unfolds Himself, and because He is immutable this unfolding is a continuous process. He has revealed Himself through the Logos, the Word of God. (Here Origen is in strict accord with all previous Christian thought.) But since He is immutable, and the revealing process is continuous, the Word must be eternal, as the Father is eternal. This Word is Jesus Christ, begotten of the substance of the Father, co-eternal and consubstantial with Him, and yet in some sense inferior, and a created being. We need not follow his argument further; he was in difficulty, as so many before him about the nature of Christ's humanity and its union with His divinity, and he fell short of the Chalcedonian formulary of 451 A.D.[1] But in the struggle against the Arians, the Athanasian party laid firm hold upon that part of his teaching which declared that Christ is eternally begotten, and in the end this doctrine was triumphantly vindicated.

Alexandria was the home of orthodoxy in the Christological discussions; not the blind orthodoxy of 'faith only, bare faith,' but the reasoned orthodoxy which sprang from the accurate appreciation of the meaning of all the previous religious history of mankind, so far as it was known to the teachers and pupils of that school. It sprang from a sense of the unity of purpose in the mind of God, and from the conviction which naturally follows, that since the Creator of all is One, with an orderly plan for the world, so mankind also is a unity. Knowledge,

[1] See next chapter, p. 216.

faith, practical experience, speculation, partial revelations are all parts of the one great whole, and point to the perfection of Godhead, manifested in the perfect humanity of Christ the Word.

If Clement is guilty of Gnostic tendencies, and Origen of minimizing the Godhead of Christ, these errors do not detract from the glory of the school which they so singularly adorned. Origen, it is true, did his life's work in Caesarea, but he was Clement's pupil, his mind was Alexandrine and his method that of his former teacher; it is proper, therefore, to regard him as an exponent of Alexandrine theology. Their successors, and more particularly Athanasius and Cyril, approached the problems which the school had set itself to solve, with the advantage of an established church and a broader outlook, which the edict of toleration alone could give, and the possession of many years' discussion of their predecessors' conclusions. To attempt to lay the foundation of a Christian philosophy was a dangerous and untried experiment in 200 A.D.; in 325 many of the church's leaders were trained philosophers, who could recognize those elements of permanent value in the teaching of earlier days, while they could correct or improve erroneous and inadequate statements. The debt to Alexandria is incalculable. Out of the Gnostic crisis was born the catechetical school; from that school Athanasius went forth, and by the steadfast loyalty of Athanasius, the truth of the fullness of Christ's godhead was finally established.

THE SCHOOL OF ANTIOCH

Antioch was the third city of the Empire, rivalling Alexandria in importance and influence; so also the Christian catechetical school, which was founded there by

Lucian some time between 280 and 312 A.D., was next only to Alexandria in the influence it exercised upon the Christological thought of the fourth and fifth centuries.

The special characteristics of Antiochene theology are traceable to Paul of Samosata, who was bishop of Antioch from about 260 to 272 A.D., *i.e.* some years before the foundation of the school. He was a man of considerable ability, held in high esteem by Zenobia,[1] queen of Palmyra, but unscrupulous and time serving. His moral character was not above suspicion, and his haughty demeanour and love of sycophantic flattery would have brought about his downfall, long before it happened, had the standard of clerical life in Antioch been higher. Theological speculation, not an easy morality, was the cause of his undoing. Zenobia was keenly interested in the Jewish religion, and Paul, perhaps desirous of still further ingratiating himself with the queen, set forth opinions about Christ as the Logos, which were more closely allied to the philosophy of Philo than to that of the school of Alexandria, or indeed of orthodox Christianity from its beginning. He taught that the Word of God was an impersonal power which dwelt in the prophets, just as reason is an impersonal attribute in man. This Word dwelt in Christ, but was not identified with Him. At His baptism Jesus of Nazareth received the aid of the Holy Ghost, and by the complete surrender of His will to God, He became divine Himself, by gradual development. Thus He was only one more, though the greatest, of all the prophets who had spoken by the inspiration of the Word. Though He might be called ' God,' the title was metaphorical and not real, for He was a human person

[1] For an account of Zenobia, the Cleopatra of her day, see Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. i.

'connected with God,' but not properly or originally divine. Paul's doctrine was condemned, and he himself deposed from his bishopric, in 272 A.D., but the influence of his teaching continued, and moulded the theological thought of the school which Lucian founded, some twenty years or so later.

What then were the characteristics of this school? It was practical rather than mystical; it laid great emphasis on the humanity of Christ and the value of His example in the everyday difficulties of life, thinking of Him as man to the neglect of His unique position as God. It disliked the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, so much prized by the followers of Origen and the Alexandrine school in general, and it approached the Bible with critical rather than mystical mind. 'There was a tendency to regard Christian morality as independent of union with Christ, and to believe that Our Lord had a completely human personality, and just as much divinity as might seem compatible with this belief.' [1]

Lucian had been one of Paul's pupils, and though he abandoned the more extreme theories of his master, he was responsible for the continuance of his main propositions, and is, so far, the author of the doctrine known as Arianism, which almost wrecked the church in the middle of the fourth century. He was excommunicated, but later made a satisfactory explanation of his opinions, and was again received into the church, suffering a martyr's death in 312 A.D. He had gathered round him a number of scholars, among whom was Arius, the chief opponent of Athanasius, and Eusebius—later bishop of Nicomedia, and later still of Constantinople, who was the 'villain of the piece' in the Arian controversy. They

[1] Pullan, *Church of the Fathers*, p. 365.

abandoned the theory of an impersonal Word, and, by admitting the pre-existence of Christ, thereby acknowledged the Incarnation of the Word, though not in the orthodox sense. This Word was a heavenly being who had existed before the creation of all things, and had brought into being the visible world, but He himself was a being created by the Father. He was not eternal, as Origen had declared Him to be, and had no existence until God called Him out of nothing, to be the instrument of all subsequent creation. This was in effect a denial of the essential Godhead of Christ; for since one attribute of godhead is the quality of eternity, nothing which has its origin in time can be co-equal and consubstantial with God.

At first men did not understand the full implications of this teaching. From the days of Philo all religious thinkers had been familiar with the idea of the procession of the Word from God; Christian philosophers were no less interested in Logos discussions than their Jewish or pagan contemporaries. But they had difficulties of their own. They believed that Christ was the Logos, they believed also that He was the Son of God, and Himself, God. Here lay the problem: God is One; if Christ be God, and the Holy Spirit be God, is there a plurality in the Godhead? Are Christians in danger of becoming tritheists? In whatever way Christian philosophers thought and spoke of Christ, the difficulty of reconciling monotheism with two—or three—persons in the Godhead was always the stumbling-block. Paul of Samosata, and the Antiochene school following him, solved the question by saying that Christ could only metaphorically be called God, that the Logos is less than God; and at first it was not perceived that this brought Christ down to the level

of a created being, with no more divinity than that of ordinary men. But when once this was grasped, conflict was inevitable. From the days of the apostles the Godhead of Christ had been the foundation of all Christian preaching : it was for this that men had laid down their lives in the persecutions : it was to Christ as God that they addressed their prayers in public worship and private devotion. However unthought-out their Christology might be, men were certain that He Who was born of a virgin, crucified under Pontius Pilate, risen and ascended to the Father in His flesh, was Himself God.

When the struggle began, Alexandria and Antioch ranged themselves on opposite sides. The tendency of the respective schools compelled them so to divide ; and yet such a division should not have been necessary. There was much in the teaching of Lucian of permanent value to the church. His critical sense in the use of Scripture, his emphasis upon the true humanity of Christ, and the supreme value of the example set before men in His human life, these are aspects of Christianity highly prized to-day. The two schools should have been supplementary : Alexandria should have supplied what was lacking in the Christological belief of Antioch, and Antioch should have checked the excessive allegorization of Scripture, which threatened to lead some Alexandrines into very curious and unorthodox by-paths.

Both schools contributed much of great value to later Christianity ; and the solid worth of much of the Antiochene theology must not be lost sight of or minimized, because in the end the church perceived that the Alexandrine point of view was more in agreement with truth, as finite man can see it. It is true, as we shall see in the next chapter, that Arius and his followers behaved very

badly, and brought discredit upon the school, and in consequence upon the whole of its teaching. They were rightly condemned for their inadequate point of view about Christ's Person, but they might have taught the church much about practical Christianity, which perhaps the Alexandrines were in danger of forgetting. Their teaching about the Logos was false, as the church came to realize as the years went on, but they are remembered more for their bad manners than for their bad theology. If Paul of Samosata had been a saint, and if Arius had been able to keep his temper, the school of Antioch might have been respected, though much of its theology would still have been condemned.

CHAPTER VIII

WHO IS CHRIST?

HERETICAL AND ORTHODOX ANSWERS IN THE IVTH AND VTH CENTURIES

For three hundred years, from the days of the apostles to the Edict of Toleration (313 A.D.), the leaders of the church had consistently claimed that they were announcing to man a revealed religion; nay more, that in their message there was contained the final revelation of God to the world. It was a startling claim to make, even in an age when new faiths were continually appearing, new gods, new hopes, new methods of worship. But great as it was, it could not win the world to itself, simply because its teachers declared that theirs was the final word of God; men asked at once for proof, for the sanctions lying behind this message, and the answer lay in the church's conception of Christ.

Christ is God: so Peter declared in his first speeches at Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost; so Paul maintained in all the cities of the Empire which he visited; and to this belief men and women, boys and girls had borne witness through fire and sword, and in the face of the wild beasts and still more savage spectators in the arena, in every persecution which had arisen for the name of Christ. Christ is God; so they proclaimed. God had

not merely spoken through Christ as a human person specially inspired by the divine spirit, but Christ, Himself a human person, was also God, and, as God, spoke the word of God and revealed God's nature to the men of His own generation in Galilee and Judaea.

The tremendous implications of this doctrine could not be appraised by most of the early converts, since they were drawn mainly from the ignorant classes of society. They rejoiced in the conviction that He Who had come to show men how to live, and to redeem them from the bondage of sin, was God Himself, to be worshipped with divine honours which could be accorded to no other person. But it was inevitable that questions concerning His Nature and Person should arise when learned men began to take a serious interest in Christianity, and a Christian philosophy began to grow up. The last chapter gave some idea of the nature of these intellectual difficulties and of the answers which various thinkers gave to the problem; but the question could not become acute while Christianity was still a *religio illicita*. To the pagan it did not much matter what Christians claimed about the founder of their religion; it was unlawful to join them, and there the matter might end. Even though this was a superficial view and did not hold good universally, and even though there was an enormous increase in the number of Christians throughout the Empire in the last seventy years before the Edict of Milan, it is still true that the problem of Christ's Person could not appear of vital importance to the world at large, when the worship of Christ was forbidden.

It is sometimes suggested that in the years 325-451 A.D. the simple Christianity of the Gospels was elaborated and developed into a complex theological system; and that

the very fact that the great dogmatic formularies which protect Christ's Godhead no less than His Manhood, were not drawn up until this time, prove that the church of the fourth century, under the influence of Hellenism, had lost touch with the simplicity of apostolic days. Such criticism is shallow and leaves out of account the one vital factor which sufficiently explains why this problem had to be faced *after* the 'Peace of the Church.'

By the Edict of Milan Christianity became not only a lawful but the favoured religion of the Empire: Constantine intended that it should take the place of all other religious systems. At once, therefore, thoughtful pagans began to enquire into the authority which lay behind the Christian doctrine and to test for themselves the claim that He Who first preached the gospel was Himself God. The official attitude of the Empire had been that of toleration towards all reasonable religions; but for political considerations, emperor worship had been increasingly insisted upon, as the boundaries of empire spread ever more widely and the difficulty of maintaining so long a frontier line became proportionately greater. Further, the cult of Mithra had been able to hold Christianity in check because it was bound up with the deification of the Emperor. Mithra was the last, as he was the most serious rival to Christ, and externally, at all events, victory was by no means certain to the followers of Jesus when Constantine became Emperor in 313 A.D.

The edict of toleration completely changed the situation. Mithra was to be superseded by Christ; nor was the Emperor any longer to be regarded as divine. The Roman world was familiar with the spectacle of rival religions gaining imperial favour, only to be rejected by later wearers of the purple; but hitherto no religion had

been allowed to take precedence over the Emperor himself. In the eyes of a pagan, therefore, Christ could never hope to maintain a position so immeasurably above that accorded to all His rivals hitherto, unless it could be proved that His Nature and His claims were infinitely beyond what Isis or Cybele or Mithra had dared to predicate of themselves. In short, the issue was simply this : if Christ was only a created being, no matter how highly exalted, there was no justification for Constantine's action, and the result could only be a prolonging of the struggle between rival religious systems. If, on the other hand, Christ's Supreme Godhead could be proved, then the Emperor was right in endeavouring to establish Christianity as the one universal religion.

The problem of Christ's Person was of no less importance to the church. The need for clear definition became more urgent as Christianity increased in popularity and thereby stood in greater danger of following the prevailing fashion and accommodating itself to pagan philosophies. The great increase in the number of professing Christians naturally presented new and special problems to the leaders of the church, in matters of doctrine and of discipline. Influential converts might endeavour to add their own pagan views to the faith they had so recently accepted. There were no adequate safeguards against the more subtle forms of heretical speculation, and indeed the early years of peace were fraught with dangers far more serious and fundamental than those of the days of persecution.

The development of philosophic speculation within the church demanded no less urgently an answer to the question 'What are we to believe about the Person of Christ?' Monotheism was the basic principle of

Christianity as it had been of Judaism, from which Christianity had sprung ; and it seemed to some that the Godhead of Christ could not be reconciled with the Oneness of God : if the Father is God, and Christ equally is God, then, they argued, there must be at least two Gods, which Scripture and all Jewish and Christian tradition alike absolutely deny. Thus a belief in Christ's Godhead appeared to lead to a denial of monotheism. Origen had realized this difficulty, and though he taught that Christ is the Logos, and the Logos is eternally begotten and co-eternal with the Father, yet in some sense He is subordinate to the Father. Only so to Origen and men who followed his line of reasoning could the oneness of God be preserved.

Thus the question was acute ; men were sharply divided into differing schools of thought, and the times insistently demanded a clear answer. It only needed one bolder than his fellows, to deny absolutely Christ's Godhead, to precipitate a crisis. Arius flung down the challenge by declaring that the Logos was a created being taken out of nothing, and that he fulfilled in Jesus Christ the functions of a soul.

ARIANISM AND THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

Is Christ God ? That was the whole issue at stake in the fourth century, and for two generations men fought over this question. It was raised in acute form in 319 A.D. ; the answer which was finally accepted was given in 325 A.D., but the formula set forth at the Council of Nicaea was not universally agreed upon until 381, when the struggle was brought to an end. The story is rather confusing ; there were so many undercurrents of intrigue, so many shades of opinion, of varying orthodoxy or heresy ;

and these are of primary interest and importance to the theologian, and only in lesser degree to those unskilled in theological dialectic. It will be our purpose, therefore, to narrate the history of the controversy as broadly as possible; to show what was at stake and why anything less than the Nicene formula would be a betrayal of Christianity; and to give in outline the work of the chief protagonists on either side.

Arius, who gave his name to this, the most famous of all heresies, had been trained in the school of Antioch, whence he had derived those theories about the Person of Christ which were destined to rend the church in twain. He was a priest, and in charge of a parish in Alexandria where he was much sought after by the women of his congregation, because of his ascetic bearing and the gentleness of his manner and voice. As a preacher of some distinction, he was able to disseminate his views with considerable success, and it was not at first realized that his teaching was a contradiction of orthodox Christianity. Briefly summarized his views, and those which his followers subsequently developed, were as follows:

(*a*) God is One, Eternal, and Unbegotten, and all other beings are His creatures. The Logos, therefore, is a creature, and, in fact, is the first of all creation.

(*b*) Since a father must exist before his son, Jesus Christ, the Son of God (the Logos of St. John), could not have existed eternally with His Father; He must come *after* Him. Therefore the Word is not eternally begotten (as Origen had declared him to be).

(*c*) Since God is the only uncreated Being, nothing that is created can be said to be like Him. Therefore the Word is *unlike* the Father.

(*d*) Jesus Christ is the first of all created beings, above

the angels, the agent through whom the universe was made. The title 'Son of God' may be granted to Him on account of His work in creation, but He does not share the divinity of God, and has no true likeness to it. Since He was Himself created He is not eternal, and therefore cannot be called 'God.'

Arius himself provoked enquiry into his teaching by accusing Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, of Sabellianism,[1] a heresy which had been condemned more than a hundred years earlier. Alexander summoned a council of Egyptian bishops to discuss the questions raised, and, after patient enquiry, and an earnest exhortation to Arius to withdraw at least the most provocative of his statements, condemned and excommunicated Arius and his followers. Thus the church in Egypt was immediately divided into two parties, the one, of those who believed in the absolute divinity of Christ, led by Alexander—the other, of those who could not accord Him the position of Son of God, but held that He was only a created being. Arius went to Caesarea, hoping to enlist the sympathy of Eusebius, bishop of that city, and the first church historian. Eusebius had a great reputation; he was pious, learned, and skilled in argument; and, though in secret he was probably Arian in sympathy, he managed to give the impression of being a cautious theologian endeavouring to hold the balance between rival doctrinal opinions. At all events, whatever his private opinion may have been, he did not feel able openly to champion the Arian cause, and Arius, restlessly seeking for revenge upon Alexander, betook himself to another Eusebius, the bishop of Nicomedia, who has already been described as 'the villain of the piece.' This Eusebius, a master of intrigue, had managed to get himself appointed

[1] For the explanation of Sabellianism, see p. 206.

bishop of the imperial city of Nicomedia; and through the Empress Constantia, sister of Constantine and wife of his fellow Emperor, Licinius, he obtained a position of influence in court circles which was destined to cause immense harm to the orthodox cause during the early years of the Arian controversy. He had been brought up in the school of Antioch, and hated Alexandrine theology no less than he despised the city of Alexandria itself; so when Arius came to him as one who had suffered grave injury at the hands of the hated bishop of that city, Eusebius at once welcomed him with open arms and set to work to win the bishops of Asia Minor to his side.

Meanwhile in Alexandria the excommunication of the Arians had had unhappy results. Women—for the most part those who had sat at the feet of Arius when he had been a parish priest in the city—tried to make things difficult for their bishop by malicious gossip and bickerings. They refused to accept his ruling in the matter and held indignation meetings, to the great scandal of the orthodox. Encouraged perhaps by the reports of their doings, Arius presently returned to Alexandria, in defiance of the sentence pronounced against him, and began to popularize his teaching by pamphleteering and by songs, set to well-known tunes. These were learnt by the rabble of the city, and by them shouted through the streets and outside the bishop's house, and in the churches during service time. The temper of the Alexandrians was not such as to ignore provocation of this kind, and brawls and street-corner fights were continually breaking out between the supporters of Arius and Alexander.

Such was the situation when, after the downfall of Licinius at the battle of Scutari in September 323 A.D.,

Constantine became sole Emperor of East and West. Above all else he desired peace in his dominions, having already experienced the disruptive influence of internecine strife among Christians in the Donatist dispute. He is not to be blamed for failing to understand how grave was the problem lying at the root of the present quarrel. It seemed to him to be a mere disputation about words, in which each side was blameworthy. At such a crisis in political affairs it was peculiarly unfortunate, and not without its dangers, that the Christians should be divided among themselves. So he wrote letters to Arius and Alexander bidding them to cease from quarrel, and imploring them to restore peace to the church and tranquillity to their sovereign.[1] Hosius, bishop of Cordova, a faithful friend and wise adviser upon religious matters, was bidden to deliver the letters. But he perceived at once, upon his arrival at Alexandria, that the question was far more serious than had been supposed. So Constantine, acting in all probability upon his advice, decided to summon a council of the whole church, hoping thereby to secure that peace which he so greatly desired within the Empire.

The council met at Nicaea in Bithynia, close to Nicomedia, in May 325 A.D. and consisted for the most part of Eastern bishops. Out of a total which varies in estimate between 220 and 318 prelates, the names of only five Western bishops appear, one each from Gaul, Calabria, Pannonia, Carthage, and Hosius of Cordova, in Spain. But the presence of so many of the leaders of the church enabled them to discuss and settle many questions, such as the proper date for the keeping of Easter, which had troubled some districts hitherto. We can confine our-

[1] See Duchesne, *Early History of the Church*, vol. ii. p. 108.

selves to the council's treatment of the Arian problem, which was the chief reason for its assembly. Three parties emerged as the discussion proceeded : the Arians, who were led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, whose real object was to strike a blow at the prestige of Alexandria ; the orthodox or anti-Arian party, led by Alexander and his deacon, Athanasius the Great, round whose person subsequently the whole controversy centred ; and a middle party which was championed by Eusebius of Caesarea, and consisted of by far the greater number of bishops present. This party was prepared to condemn the statements of Arius as unwarranted by Scripture and all the previous teaching of the church, but Eusebius was either too cautious, or too uncertain in his own mind, to do more than this. So the middle party was opposed to the policy of Athanasius, who desired that the council should draw up some clear statement of belief which should be the final test of catholicity.

The first business was to consider the action of Alexander and his Egyptian bishops in having deposed and excommunicated Arius. However cautious the majority of the bishops present might be, there were very few who could support Arian statements such as : ' There was once when the Son of God did not exist,' or ' He was created out of nothing by the Father.' Alexander's decision was upheld and reaffirmed. So far the matter was simple ; it is always easier to condemn doubtful or heretical opinion than to put forth a positive statement which shall be sufficient rebutment of error, and so it was now. Most of the bishops held back from taking the line which Athanasius is said to have urged upon them, for he was the spokesman of the orthodox party, and it was not till the Arians took action themselves that they

felt compelled to issue some positive formula. Arius and his friends composed and laid before the assembled fathers a creed wholly Arian in complexion, and invited the council to set its seal of approval upon it. This was altogether too much for the most cautious bishop; amid loud and angry cries the creed was torn in shreds and the necessity for some definite pronouncement recognized. Eusebius of Caesarea then produced the baptismal creed used in his own diocese, and though it was in some ways non-committal or capable of less than orthodox interpretation, it was finally accepted with the addition of certain crucial words and phrases which disposed of the Arian opinions and clearly established the doctrine that Christ is no less God than the Father Himself.

In the creed which follows, the important phrases which declare the essential Godhead of Christ, and which were added by the council, are printed in italics:

> 'We believe in one God, Father Almighty, Author of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, *i.e. of the substance of the Father*, God of God, Light of Light, *Very God of Very God, begotten and not made, of the same substance* (ὁμοούσιος) *with the Father*, by Whom all things came into being, both the things that are in heaven and the things that are on earth. Who *for us men* and for our salvation *came down* and became flesh, became Man, suffered, was raised to life the third day, ascended into heaven and will come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit.'

The Godhead of the Son, and His equality with the Father as touching his Godhead was sufficiently established

by the insertion of the word 'homo-ousios' (ὁμοούσιος); but that there should be no loophole for Arian interpretations of the creed, the following anathemas were added: As to those who say, 'There was a once when He was not; before He was begotten He was not; He was made of nothing, or of another substance, or being; or created, or capable of change, or alteration'; the Catholic Church says Anathema.

All the bishops except two signed these statements; Arius and his friends were sent into exile by Constantine's orders, for the Emperor was determined to have no more dissensions in the church and to see that the decisions of this, his very own council, were adhered to. The triumph of the orthodox seemed complete. Ultimately, as we shall see, this was the case; but Eusebius of Nicomedia, though he realized the need for prudence at the moment, did not intend to accept so crushing a defeat without resistance, and hardly had the bishops begun to disperse to their own dioceses again, than he set to work, by surreptitious intrigues, to undo the work of the council. The story of the ensuing half century is best told in connection with the life of Athanasius; so we will now turn to consider the labours of this great champion of the faith, through whose efforts, at times almost entirely unaided, the vital truth of Christ's Godhead was preserved.

FROM THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA TO THE DEATH OF CONSTANTINE

Athanasius had been trained in the school of Alexandria and first became prominent at the Council of Nicaea, which he attended as chaplain to the bishop of Alexandria. He made a great impression on the council by his clarity of

utterance in support of the orthodox party, and if he was not technically the leader of the Catholics, as the orthodox were called, it is clear that his words had very great weight among them. Of lion-hearted courage which refused to yield to threats or persecution, he yet possessed a sweetness and tranquillity of mind which endeared him, not only to his immediate circle of friends, but to men of widely differing temperaments, among whom his lot was cast in the successive periods of exile from his native city, which he endured on behalf of the faith. He had the gift, rare even among men of intellectual powers considerably greater than his own, of being able to see clearly and at once what was the real issue at stake in a controversy, and of stating his point of view with simplicity and conviction. When he was elected to succeed Alexander in the see of Alexandria in 327 or 328 A.D. the Christians of that city hailed him as 'An upright man and a virtuous, a good Christian, an ascetic, a real bishop.' He never lost the affection of his own flock even though at one time he appeared to stand alone—*Athanasius contra mundum*. He was the leader of the '*Homo-ousios*' party, *i.e.* the party which succeeded in getting the word *Homo-ousios* (of the same substance) inserted in the Nicaean formula, whereby the Godhead of Christ was clearly stated. Eusebius of Nicomedia had accepted the word, not because he believed it, but because he saw that the Emperor favoured it, and he was afraid lest his position in Court circles might be endangered if he opposed it. But he was determined to get this decree of the council rescinded, and as soon as possible he began to poison Constantine's mind against the orthodox bishops, his accusations against Athanasius being particularly scandalous.

As it would have been useless to attack him on theological grounds, some more dangerous line must be chosen. So first, in 331 A.D., he was accused of supporting certain rebels with money, but the charge could not be maintained for the evidence was too flimsily constructed. Then his traducers said that he had cruelly persecuted a certain priest, Ischyras by name ; that he had caused him to be disturbed while celebrating the Eucharist, and that in the scuffle the chalice had been broken. This charge also fell to the ground, for it was discovered that Ischyras was not a priest at all, that there had been no celebration of the Holy Communion in the village church over which he was supposed to preside, on the morning of the alleged brawl, and that the village did not possess a chalice. As the charges of treason and sacrilege had broken down some fresh accusations must be laid. The Emperor had recently given orders that witchcraft and the use of magical arts must be severely repressed, the penalty for those who practised them being death. It was alleged that Athanasius had murdered a certain schismatic bishop, Arsenius, and had cut off the dead man's hand to use it for magical purposes. A council of bishops which happened to be sitting at Tyre summoned Athanasius to appear and answer the charge. His prosecutors, at the trial, produced a hand which they declared was the hand of the murdered bishop ; but Athanasius was ready for them. At his side as he made his defence stood a heavily veiled figure : at the critical moment, amid the excitement of the crowded court, he bade the figure stand forth and stretch out its hands : there stood the real Arsenius, alive and with both his hands ! After the first shock of surprise his enemies declared that Athanasius had hypnotized the court and that Arsenius was only an optical delusion ; but

presently they fled in confusion and Athanasius triumphantly left the court. No sooner had he retired, however, than the council condemned him in absence, and he sought the Emperor in person at Constantinople. Constantine treated the accusations as frivolous, and would no doubt have sent him back to his diocese, but his enemies appeared with a fresh charge. The bishop, they said, had determined to stir up strife in Constantinople by preventing or delaying the sailing of the corn ships from Alexandria, destined for that city. This was altogether too much for Constantine, and without waiting to hear his defence, he sent Athanasius into exile in 336 A.D. Flushed with victory, Eusebius persuaded Constantine to recall Arius from exile, but he died in 337 A.D., suddenly, before he could enjoy his new freedom.

It would be inaccurate to think of Athanasius' banishment as the downfall of the orthodox party. So far the struggle, since Nicaea, had been a personal one; the formulary of the Nicene fathers had not yet been called into question. But within a very short time the whole church became involved in the controversy: men saw that behind the two main figures in the quarrel lay the fundamental matter concerning the Person of Christ, and they took sides in the dispute according to their doctrinal point of view. Political events largely influenced the course of the struggle, and it is necessary to take them into account if the ebb and flow of the controversy is to be understood.

Constantine died in 337 A.D., being baptized on his deathbed by Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the Empire was divided between his three sons, Constantine II., who ruled over Gaul and died in 340; Constans, who received Italy and Illyricum and died in 350, and Constantius II., who governed the whole East and became sole Emperor after

the death of Constans. The subsequent history of Arianism is much more clear when it is remembered that Constantius was greatly influenced by Eusebius, who got himself translated from Nicomedia to Constantinople in 339. The East, therefore, under the combined influence of Emperor and bishop, supported the Arianisers. But the western bishops, perhaps not understanding the subtle reasoning of their eastern brethren, and led by Athanasius, who spent the eight years of his second exile (339-347) among them, espoused the orthodox cause and won over Constans to their side. Thus in general the ecclesiastical parties grouped themselves according to political and geographical divisions, and though it is not true at every moment, it is true for the most part that the East was Arian, the West Catholic.

FROM THE DEATH OF CONSTANTINE TO THE ACCESSION OF JULIAN, 337-361 *A.D.*

The death of Constantine marks the opening of a fresh phase. Henceforth the struggle was theological rather than political ; it involved groups rather than individuals, and it was fought out in ecclesiastical courts rather than in the civil courts of the Empire.

Upon their accession the joint Emperors agreed to pronounce a general amnesty to all exiled ecclesiastics, and Athanasius returned to his see, being welcomed with loud manifestations of joy by the Catholics of Alexandria. But Eusebius could not let the matter rest, and almost immediately brought fresh accusations against him. Of these the most serious, and that most likely to wean Constantius from him, was the charge that he had appropriated certain corn ships, sent by the Emperor as a personal gift to the poor of Alexandria, to his own use

and had sold the corn at a profit to himself. He was deposed, an Arianiser was appointed bishop in his stead, and he fled to Rome in 337, where he remained for eight years expounding the catholic position concerning Christ's Godhead, and laying the foundation of that Western orthodoxy which has already been noticed.

East and West now began to hold councils, the East endeavouring to overthrow the decisions of Nicaea and to force an Arian creed upon the Church, the West, under Pope Julius, content to vindicate Athanasius and his doctrine. However, in 343 Constans and Constantius agreed that a council of the whole church should be summoned to Sardica (the modern Sophia) and an attempt made to bring these unseemly quarrels to an end. Eusebius of Constantinople died shortly before the council met, but his party was vigorous and quarrelsome and imbued to the full with the spirit of that arch intriguer. The Eusebians, as they may be called, were determined to have as little to do with the orthodox as possible. Accordingly, when the council met they raised objections to the presence of Athanasius on the ground that, since he had been deposed from his see, he was no longer a lawful bishop. When their protest was rejected they retired from Sardica and held a council of their own at Philippopolis, in Thrace, and excommunicated the bishops assembled at Sardica. These promptly replied with a like excommunication. Thus the attempt to settle the dispute by means of a council proved abortive at this stage. But Sardica was important in other ways, and we shall have occasion to refer to it again in some detail when we come to consider the growth of the papacy.[1]

From now onwards the church was divided into four

[1] See pp. 253-4.

parties over this vital question of the relationship of the Son to the Father.

(1) The Orthodox, who declared that he is (*homo-ousios*) of the same substance as the Father.

(2) The semi-Arian, who declared that he is (*homoi-ousios*) of like substance to the Father.

(3) The secretly Arian, who declared that he is (*homoios*) like the Father.

(4) The openly Arian, who declared that he is (*anomoios*) unlike the Father.

All four parties strove to gain a majority in favour of their point of view, but none of them had sufficient weight to turn the scales by themselves. Thus the story of the next seventeen years is simply one of manœuvring and counter manœuvring for position, in which the orthodox steadily lost ground. Athanasius, it is true, was restored to his see on the death of the intruder Gregory in 346; but though he managed to remain in Alexandria for nearly ten years, his presence there was a source of continual annoyance to his Arian neighbours, and there were intrigues of all kinds set on foot to get him expelled once more.

Constans, who had consistently championed the Catholics, was assassinated in 350 A.D. and the whole Empire passed under the sovereignty of Constantius, who was avowedly on the side of the Arians. It is largely on this account that the years 350-360 are reckoned as being the high-water mark of Arian success; certain it is that with the publication of the Sirmian Blasphemy [1] in 357 the Catholic cause seemed lost.

Meanwhile, in 353, a fresh attack was made on Athanasius, and again it was political and not theological. His

[1] See below, p. 200.

influence in Alexandria, and the affection in which he was held by his flock, were like ramparts against the Arian advance, and complete victory was impossible while he retained possession of his see. Constantius, not unnaturally, eyed him with suspicion; he seemed to him to be a fomenter of strife, a dangerous person to be holding office in so inflammable a corner of his dominions as the Nile delta, and an obstinate, bigoted fanatic. Like Henry II. of England, he would be glad if he might be rid of this turbulent priest. So the Arians at the Emperor's court began to whisper that Athanasius was disloyal to his sovereign, and that he had endeavoured, during the lifetime of Constans, to provoke civil war between the brothers by poisoning the mind of Constans against Constantius; they further declared that he was an intruder in the see of Alexandria, since the Council of Tyre had deposed him as long ago as 335 A.D. Not content with stirring up the Emperor against him, they tried to win the new pope, Liberius, by inundating him with letters of complaint against his evil doings.

But Athanasius did not lack friends among his own countrymen; Serapion, bishop of Thumis, headed a deputation to Liberius bringing a petition in his favour, signed by over eighty bishops in Egypt. Encouraged by their action, and hoping, perhaps, that their protest would carry sufficient weight to win a verdict favourable to Athanasius, Liberius requested Constantius to summon a council to discuss the whole matter in dispute, once more. The Emperor consented, seizing upon the opportunity to get this troublesome bishop condemned once and for all. When the council met at Milan in 355 it was clear that the influence of Constantius and the Eastern prelates was too strong; and so cunningly did they state

their case that they carried the Westerns with them, and only three bishops refused to sign the sentence of deposition which Constantius laid before the Council. They were banished, and Athanasius stood alone against the united political and ecclesiastical forces of the Empire. He was left in possession of his see, however, for nearly two years, since the Emperor, though anxious to get rid of him, was probably afraid of the violence of the Alexandrian mob in defence of their bishop. At all events no open action was taken as yet, and Athanasius refused to leave his diocese until bidden by the Emperor so to do. But at last he had to fly for his life. He was conducting a midnight service in one of his churches on February 8, 356, when soldiers surrounded the building, broke in with drawn swords, and began to kill the worshippers. The bishop, apparently unrecognized by the officer in charge, remained quietly seated, until his friends were able to push a way through the crowd, and he escaped with his life, though badly knocked about. He fled to the desert of Egypt and lived in company with Christian hermits for about six years, and this is reckoned as his third exile. He was succeeded by George of Cappadocia, (wrongly identified by Gibbon with St. George the patron saint of England,) a man of no spirituality, but cruel and avaricious, who dealt with his flock more after the manner of a tyrant than of a chief shepherd. Liberius had been banished from Rome because of his support of Athanasius, and his see was in the hands of Felix, an Arian ; thus with the leaders of the orthodox in banishment, and all the chief sees held by Arians, the way was at last clear for the putting forth of a creed which should deny and replace the formulary drawn up at Nicaea thirty years before.

A council was held at Sirmium in 357 A.D. which put

forth a creed, later known as the Sirmian Blasphemy. It did not go as far as the openly Arian party would have wished and declare that the Son is *unlike* the Father, but it repudiated the terms *homo-ousios* and *homoi-ousios* to describe the relation of the Son to the Father. It declared that there is but one God, and the Son is inferior to Him and in subjection to Him. All the bishops present signed it, even the aged Hosius who had presided at Nicaea, and had consistently championed Athanasius in his trials. It is not clear whether the pope, Liberius, signed the Sirmian creed or only made a formal repudiation of Athanasius. At all events, so far as could be seen, the whole Church had denied the Godhead of the Son by declaring Him to be a being inferior to the Father; 'the whole world groaned and wondered to find itself Arian.'

But the triumph was too complete. Moderate men, though they disliked the orthodox term, *homo-ousios*, because it could not be found in Scripture, and though they had been carried along by the vehemence of the Arians, could not accept a statement which by implication denied the Godhead of Him Who was the centre of their religious hopes, and for whose sake their fathers had gladly laid down their lives. Reaction set in almost immediately, and in the very next year (358) a local council at Ancyra issued a statement which, though not so complete and unequivocal as the original formula of Nicaea, yet marks the beginning of a fresh understanding between the Catholics and the semi-Arians, and ended in the victory of the Catholic party in 381. The bishops at Ancyra said that the Son is like the Father in substance, and 'perfect of perfect'; and this, as will be seen at once, differs from the Catholic position only in the form of words,

for the council of Ancyra clearly declared the Godhead of Christ.

This rapprochement was hastened in its early stages by the most unlooked-for and unlikely political events, which turned men's minds from internal struggles to the consideration of means whereby they might secure the safety of the Church in the face of a common foe.

JULIAN THE APOSTATE AND THE PAGAN REACTION

Gibbon devotes brilliant chapters to the character and reign of the Emperor Julian, and the student who desires to acquaint himself with this most interesting and melancholy figure cannot afford to neglect them. Here our space is too limited to enable us to do more than indicate in briefest outline the salient points of Julian's reign.

Julius Constantius, father of Julian and brother of Constantine, had been murdered in the massacres which followed upon Constantine's death, and Julian, then a child of six years, had been brought up under the protection of Constantius II. He was handed over to the care of Eusebius of Nicomedia and baptized in childhood, but seems always to have been in revolt against the religion which was forced upon him in early years. The atmosphere of ecclesiastical intrigue, and the incessant disputes due to the Arian controversy were ill-calculated to strengthen the faith of one who was naturally inclined to pagan philosophy ; but it was not until his election as sole Emperor in 361, at the age of thirty years, that he openly declared himself a pagan.

A man of chaste and ascetic life, possessing considerable intellectual gifts, he had a strong vein of superstition in his nature and fell far short of the loftiness of Marcus

Aurelius, whom he took for his pattern. He was fanatical in his zeal for the religious ideas of earlier days, and like all fanatics, was a man of narrow prejudice, and vindictive towards opponents. His creed, so far as he could formulate it, was probably Neo-Platonism, but to this he added magic and a ceremonial borrowed from the worship of the Christian church, which he had known all through his early life.

When he became Emperor he declared that it was his intention to pursue a policy of toleration towards all religions; but it soon became evident that this toleration was to be used as a cloak for the persecution of Christianity. State aid was withdrawn from the church; the clergy were ordered to undertake the ordinary duties of civil life, from which they had been exempted by Constantine, in order that they might give themselves entirely to the work of their ministry, and Christians were forbidden to accept posts in the teaching professions. A decree was issued that 'public possessions' were to be restored, the temples reopened, and sacrifices offered as in former days. The first part of this decree fell, designedly, with particular hardship upon Christians; some of the temples had been destroyed in the new zeal for Christianity after the edict of toleration, some had been converted into Christian churches. The decree was so interpreted as to compel Christians to help in the rebuilding of these temples and to give up such of them as had been used for Christian worship.

In order to discredit Christianity still further, Julian attempted to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, hoping thereby to revive Judaism, always the bitterest foe of the church, and to make it more difficult for Christians to make pilgrimages to the holy places of their religion in the

city where Christ had suffered and had risen again from the dead. In this he was thwarted by an event which, to his superstitious mind, seemed wholly supernatural. When the foundations of the old temple were being excavated, balls of fire burst from among the débris and burnt several of the workmen, who could not be induced to return to the place. Whatever may be the truth of the story, Julian abandoned the project, and made no further attempt to revive Judaism.

But perhaps the most subtle form of persecution was his edict recalling all exiled bishops to their sees. No doubt he hoped that, by flinging them into one another's arms, controversy would break out afresh so fiercely, that the church would be rent asunder and the more easily destroyed. But the result was far otherwise. Athanasius, of course, was among the restored bishops, and he was welcomed back to Alexandria with every possible sign of rejoicing. So far from a renewal of strife, in the face of common danger the Semi-Arians and the Catholics drew nearer together and the work of reconciliation went on apace. A Council of Nicene defenders was held under the presidency of Athanasius in his see city in 362, whose decrees were a definite advance towards union. It was decided that all bishops who had held the orthodox faith, but under pressure had signed heretical creeds, could be regarded as the catholic bishops of the sees which they held, provided that they withdrew their signatures and accepted once more the decrees of Nicaea. These decisions were sent to Antioch, the headquarters of the Semi-Arian party, and met with general acceptance, so that reunion in the East seemed to be within measurable distance of accomplishment. This strengthening of the bonds drove Julian to fury ; he banished Athanasius as

a 'despicable mannikin and an enemy of the gods,' and the great champion departed once more, into his fourth exile.

But the tyranny of the Emperor did not last long. Julian was wounded in battle against the Persians near Baghdad, and died in his tent a few hours later, in the year 363 A.D. In later days a legend grew up that his dying words were 'Thou hast conquered, O Galilean.' Whether it be true or not is of no vital moment, the moral behind is clear enough. Julian had failed to wreck the Christian religion; his efforts at destruction had resulted in a fresh knitting of the ties between Christians; they had shown conclusively that the victory for Christ was already won, that faith in Jesus of Nazareth was strong enough to resist new onslaughts from a dying Paganism, and in point of fact, whether he acknowledged it or no, the Galilean had conquered.

Julian was succeeded by Jovian, an easy-going Christian, who immediately recalled Athanasius, but only lived to enjoy his honours for one year. At his death the Empire was again divided between two brothers; the West fell to Valentinian, a Catholic, but more desirous for peace than for orthodoxy; the East was ruled, till 378, by Valens, a strong supporter of the Arians. So the political conditions of the days of Constans and Constantius II. were revived again. But Christians had learnt that they must compose their differences without regard to imperial favour or opposition, and though Valens hindered the triumph of orthodoxy, he was unable to prevent the steady advance towards religious unity which marks the years of his reign.

FROM THE ACCESSION OF VALENS TO THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE, 364-381 A.D.

In spite of the support of Valens, the openly Arian party steadily dwindled in influence, and the final stages of the struggle were fought out between the semi-Arians and the Catholics. The former gained the Emperor's permission to hold a council at Lampsacus, in 365, at which a most significant advance was made. The bishops assembled, who hitherto had not dared to commit themselves to more than the statement that 'The Son is like the Father,' now declared that He is 'like the Father according to substance.' It was not a long step from this to the completely orthodox position that He is of the same substance as the Father; and yet they could not, at that time, bring themselves to accept it. Valens rejected the decision, and retorted by exiling once more all the bishops whom Constantius had previously banished, and for the fifth and last time, Athanasius was driven from his see. But the faithful in Alexandria refused to submit to the decree, and, fearing the violence of the mob, Valens allowed Athanasius to return after an absence of only a few months. At last the persecution of this great saint and champion of truth was ended; he was left in peace and remained quietly administering his diocese and strengthening the growing opinion in favour of the original Nicene formulary, till his death on May 2, 373. He did not live long enough to see the final vindication of all for which he had given his life; but under the leadership of Hilary, bishop of Poictiers, and Pope Liberius, who had unequivocally returned to the Catholic position, and, on the whole, supported by Valentinian, the West had become orthodox once more, and signs were not wanting that in the East victory would not long be delayed. At one time Athanasius had stood alone

against the world; before his death he was able to see the world coming back to the apostolic truth for which he had fought, that Christ is very God, equal to and of the same substance as the Father, from Whom He had proceeded forth and come into the world.

It was clear after the Council of Lampsacus that the Semi-Arians and the Catholics were divided over the question of words rather than of fundamental belief. The difficulty lay in the meaning of the word *ousia* (substance) as applied to Christ. From Aristotle's day the word implied the fact of *being*, τὸ εἶναι (existence). To the Semi-Arians it seemed a dangerous thing to speak of Christ as 'being of the same *being* or existence as the Father.' More than one hundred years before, a Christian teacher, Sabellius[1] by name, had endeavoured to explain the mystery of the Trinity by saying that the one God reveals Himself in three activities: in the work of creation He revealed Himself as Father; in the work of redemption He revealed Himself as Son; as the giver of holiness He reveals himself as the Holy Spirit. The essence of Sabellius' teaching was that the One God changed Himself into Son or Spirit as the need of the particular activity required. This had been universally condemned, but the Semi-Arians feared that if the word *homo-ousios* (of the same substance as the Father) was used of Christ, the church would lapse into Sabellianism once more. Hence, while accepting His Godhead, they preferred to speak of Him as *homoi-ousios* (of like substance to the Father), in order, as they thought, to avoid this difficulty. They did not perceive that their own word was capable of an interpretation which would predicate of the Son something less than perfect Godhead; and that

[1] See p. 186.

the catholic word alone could safeguard the equality between Father and Son, which was an inevitable corollary of the belief in His divinity, which they shared with the orthodox. It was a question of words, but as yet no solution could be found. It is to Basil of Caesarea (*ob.* 379 A.D.), the greatest of the three Cappadocian fathers (the other two were his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and his friend and early companion Gregory of Nazianzen), that the church owes the elucidation of this language problem. Basil seized upon another Greek word, *hypostasis*,[1] which, though much less frequently used, was familiar to philosophers, and was the equivalent of *ousia* as expressing the essential foundation of a thing. He defined *hypostasis* as being a special and particular sense of *ousia*. '*Ousia* has the same relation to *Hypostasis* as the general has to the particular. Every one of us shares in existence by the common term of *Ousia*, and by his own properties is such and such a one.' In this sense *Hypostasis* in Greek is equivalent to *Persona* in Latin, and in simple language may be expressed as follows : all men have a common substance, but each is a separate person with his own individuality, though he shares in the substance of all humanity. So of the Trinity Basil would say, ' The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share a common *substance* of Godhead, but each possesses His own separate Person in the One Godhead.' He wrote in one of his letters : ' The term *ousia* is common, like goodness, or godhead, or any similar attribute ; while *hypostasis* is contemplated in the special property of Fatherhood, Sonship, or the power to sanctify.'

Basil wrote letters to the Western bishops expounding

[1] For the history of the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* the reader is referred to Professor Bethune Baker's *Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine.*

the meaning of the word *ousia* as applied to the Son, and though his explanations were coldly received at first, they slowly won their way to acceptance in both East and West; but complete unity could not be attained during the lifetime of Valens.

Gratian had succeeded Valentinian in the West in 375, and had come under the influence of Ambrose of Milan, who was a strong supporter of orthodoxy; thus Western Christianity was still further inclined to the Catholic side. Valens died in the battle of Adrianople, fighting against the Goths, in 378, and Gratian appointed as his successor Theodosius, like himself, a catholic, and eager for the peace of the Church. Upon his entry into Constantinople in 380 A.D. Theodosius issued an edict which left no doubt as to his own opinions, or what the end of the Arian struggle would be. 'We desire,' he said, 'that all nations who are governed by the rule of our clemency, shall practise the religion which the apostle Peter himself taught the Romans, and which is now held by the Pontiff Damasus (the bishop of Rome) and by Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity. That according to the discipline of the apostles, and the teaching of the Evangelists, they believe in the one Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in equal Majesty, and in the Holy Trinity.' Only those who were in communion with Damasus and Peter were to be regarded as Catholics, or to be allowed to use the title. The rest were heretics, and they were threatened with penalties if they persisted in opposition.

Arianism was not the only problem in need of solution, however. The church was divided about the Person of the Holy Spirit, and an entirely new controversy had arisen, concerning the *humanity* of Christ. Some of the

semi-Arians, though they declared that the Son is truly God, were unable to believe the same of the Holy Spirit, whom they spoke of as the highest of created beings. Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople (*ob.* 360 A.D.) is generally supposed to have been the leader of this party, who, from him, were given the title Macedonians. The other controversy, concerning the humanity of Christ, will be dealt with presently, and we can leave it alone for the moment. But there was need for a clear understanding about both these questions, and so Theodosius, not willing that the church should come to a formal agreement merely because of his edict, summoned a council to Constantinople in 381 A.D.

The history of this council is obscure and its composition extraordinary. No Western bishops attended, and its first president, Meletius, though a man of saintly life and held in universal respect, was not recognized by Rome as the lawful bishop of Antioch, over which see he ruled. He died during the sessions of the council, and his successor Nectarius, appointed by Theodosius, a government official and not yet baptized, had a reputation for worldliness in early life, which was hardly consonant with his holding of so important an office as that of chairman of a council of the church. The decrees of Constantinople were accepted, however, by the whole church, and the council is regarded as having oecumenical authority, because of this ratifying consent.[1] It condemned Arianism, Macedonianism, and Apollinarianism, but it is doubtful whether a positive statement was put forth or not. It was generally believed, until recent times that the longer form of the Nicene Creed, as now used by the church, was promulgated by this council, and the fact that this creed was read

[1] See note on the word Oecumenical at the end of the chapter, p. 218.

and confirmed by the fourth oecumenical council, at Chalcedon in 451, as being the 'Creed of Constantinople,' lends colour to this belief. But modern historians are doubtful about it, and it would be unwise to speak of the Nicene creed in its present form as the work of Constantinople. It is not an important point; the crucial word *homo-ousios* had been inserted at Nicaea; that statement was ratified at Constantinople and appears in the later creed, so that the truth of Christ's perfect Godhead was sufficiently safeguarded. Besides this, Arianism was condemned by the council unequivocally, and we are justified, since its decisions were not disputed, in dating the final victory of Catholicism from this time.

Theodosius set his seal to the decrees; he ordered that all churches must be restored to the orthodox party, specifying those bishops who might so be regarded, and he forbade all meetings for heretical worship in town or country. In the same year Western bishops met at Aquileia and condemned the Arian opinions, and thus the triumph of Catholicism was complete. Except among the Goths, who had been converted by Arian missionaries, Arianism was everywhere discredited, and the doctrine that Christ is perfect God, of the same substance as the Father, begotten eternally by the Father, and equal to Him as touching His Godhead, was not seriously challenged again for more than a thousand years.

'What think ye of Christ?' So Our Lord had enquired of the Pharisees, and they could give no answer. The early Christians had proclaimed aloud their answer, 'He is God.' But the problem became acute again when Christianity was accepted as the favoured religion of the Empire. The Council of Nicaea replied, as the apostles and martyrs had declared, 'He is God.' And finally,

after sixty years of bitter strife, of shameful intrigue, and of magnificent loyalty, the Church once more proclaimed with united voice ' He is God.'

CHRIST'S HUMAN NATURE : APOLLINARIANISM : NESTORIANISM : EUTYCHIANISM.

The problems concerning Christ's Person were not all solved by the final acceptance of the homo-ousian formula ; the fact of His Godhead was thereby secured, but new questions arose about His Manhood. He had appeared on earth in human flesh and had lived the common life of men, experiencing birth, childhood, manhood with its joys and sorrows, and death. As against the Gnostics, Christian writers had emphasized the true humanity of the Saviour ; but it was not easy to reconcile perfect Godhead and perfect Manhood in one Person.[1] The acceptance of belief in His absolute and perfect Deity had made the problems surrounding His Manhood all the more acute, and these had to be solved, before the church could put into formulated language that which the New Testament writers had said, of Him whom Christians, from the beginning, had believed to be God and Man.

A full treatment of the Christological discussions of the first half of the fifth century is outside the scope of this book ; it is only possible to indicate their nature and to give the answer of the councils summoned to deal with them. The fundamental difficulty can be stated shortly

[1] *Perfect Man.* In modern speech the phrase ' Perfect Man ' usually refers to moral perfection, but in theological language it is not so confined. The description of Christ as being ' Perfect God and Perfect Man ' implies that He possesses in one Person all the attributes of Deity and all the attributes of humanity, so that He is complete God and complete Man.

as follows: Christ is perfect God and perfect Man; but how can two perfect wholes be one perfect whole; how can Christ, Who is God and Man be One? What is the relation between His divinity and His humanity, and how is His unity of Person preserved? Three solutions were offered.

Apollinarius was bishop of Laodicea about 370 A.D., and a strong opponent of Arianism; while he firmly believed that Christ is of the same substance as the Father, he could not believe that He is also of the same substance as man; it seemed to him to imply a double personality in Christ. Further, he thought if Christ possesses a human soul (which He must do if He is perfect Man), then He must be capable of moral change, and this seemed to throw doubts upon His sinlessness, or at least to suggest that He shared the common taint of all mankind. His line of escape was to say that Christ, truly God, came down from Heaven and took a human body, but that the human spirit, with its mind and will, had been replaced by the divine element, the Logos. In one sentence his teaching amounted to this: Christ is divine and half human.

So he thought to safeguard the unity of Person in Christ; but in so doing he deprived our Lord of just that element which was the secret of His power among men, that is to say, His human sympathy, born out of the experience of human joys and sorrows, which are realized in the mind and will rather than in the flesh. And if Christ had no human will, then His offering of Himself to the Father as Redeemer, was not the perfect offering of man for his fellow man, for it was not the outcome of the voluntary surrender of His human will to the will of God. If Christ did not possess a human spirit, His union with man consisted only in a union with those qualities which

man shares with the lower animals, and redemption is emptied of its meaning and power.

This doctrine was condemned at the Council of Constantinople, and at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. the church declared that Christ is perfect (*i.e.* complete) Man.

Nestorius was appointed to the bishopric of Constantinople in 427, and has given his name to the Nestorian heresy. Some recent investigators incline to the opinion that he has been made the scapegoat for the heresy, but that he himself was blameless. Be that as it may, a party known as Nestorians put forward the following theory about Christ's Person in the early years of the fifth century, but it really dates from Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia, about 394.

Jesus Christ is distinct from the person of God the Son, and the Virgin Mary should not be spoken of as 'she who brought forth God,' because she bore, not God the Son, but the man Jesus, Who by holiness of life and the surrender of His will, was gradually more and more closely united with God the Son. It was impossible, they said, for God to be born of a woman. Thus during His earthly life, there dwelt two persons in Christ, the Son of God and the human Jesus. Earlier heretics had declared that on the Cross the divine Person forsook the human Jesus, and He who died upon Calvary was not God, as the apostles had taught, but man only. Nestorius did not actually teach this, but his doctrine is really indistinguishable from it, for he taught 'not God really incarnate, but a man morally deified.' [1]

Such teaching was in effect a complete denial of the

[1] Bright, *Notes on the Canons of the First Four General Councils*, p. 65.

Incarnation and of the Atonement. The apostles and their successors had always taught that God *became* man, that He identified Himself with humanity by taking upon Himself human flesh, with all its limitations and possibilities; that *in it* He had lived and declared Himself to the world, and *in it* had suffered upon the cross; so the Son of God truly died, offering Himself to the Father in His human flesh as a perfect sacrifice for sin.

A council of the Church, known as the third Oecumenical Council, was held at Ephesus in 431 to discuss the Nestorian heresy. Nestorius was condemned, deposed, and banished to Egypt, where he died in 439. Cyril of Alexandria (known to readers of Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia*) led the Catholics and was responsible for the anathemas pronounced against the heretics, but it is noteworthy that no new creed was put forth on the orthodox side.

Nestorianism had this great merit, that it clearly recognized two natures in Christ, the divine and the human; but it could not reconcile them in one Person. Cyril seems to have realized this unity of Person, but the Nestorians were afraid that the true humanity of our Lord might be obscured. So they refused to accept the decisions of the Council; they would not acknowledge that Cyril's teaching was orthodox, and ultimately there grew up on the East Syrian borders of the Empire a body of Christians, still known as the Nestorian Church.

Eutychianism arose in part as a reaction against Nestorianism. Eutyches, abbot of a monastery near Constantinople, and an ardent follower of Cyril, in his eagerness to insist upon the unity of Christ's Person, appeared to be confusing the two Natures, and of teaching that Christ has only one Nature; that after the Incarnation the human nature was assimilated by the Logos, so that

Christ's body was no longer of the same substance as ours, but a divine body ; His human nature was thus transmuted into the divine.

A local council at Constantinople condemned Eutyches on the ground that he was reviving Apollinarianism, and he was excommunicated. But he was supported by Dioscorus of Alexandria, a man of violent temper, who on personal grounds was in opposition both to Rome and Constantinople. Both Eutyches and his accusers, who were led by Flavian, the bishop of Constantinople, wrote to the pope, Leo I., stating their position, and Leo replied in a letter which became famous throughout the church as the ' Tome, *i.e.* Doctrinal Statement, of St. Leo.' In it he maintained the reality and distinctness of the human and divine natures in Christ, equally insisting upon the unity of His Person. This was in effect a fresh condemnation of Eutyches ; but as the Emperor had agreed to summon a general council, Leo contented himself with sending delegates to put forward his point of view. The Council met at Ephesus in 449, and was presided over by Dioscorus, who, by his violence of temper, terrorized the assembled bishops. Dioscorus behaved with shameful unfairness ; Eutyches was allowed to make his defence at length, but the orthodox were shouted down whenever they tried to speak. The result, as might be expected, was a triumphant vindication of the Eutychian view. The council broke up in confusion and the delegates came to blows, Flavian being kicked to death by monks from the monastery of Eutyches. When he heard of it Leo said, ' This is not a council but a gang of brigands.' It was clear that the matter could not rest there.

In the following year Theodosius II. was succeeded by Pulcheria as sole Empress ; she had married a senator,

Marcian, and they were both friendly to Leo and afraid that Dioscorus might attempt to gain for himself a position as Pope of Alexandria. This would have been a serious threat to Rome politically and ecclesiastically; so Marcian summoned a general council of the whole church to meet at Nicaea, but as he could not get there himself, its meeting place was transferred to Chalcedon.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) is reckoned as the fourth Oecumenical Council. About six hundred bishops, mostly from the East, attended, and there were also representatives of the Senate. It condemned the decisions of the Robber Council and deposed Dioscorus; it reaffirmed the longer creed, usually known as the 'Nicene Creed,' as being 'the faith of all'; it discussed and finally accepted Leo's Tome, and it drew up a Definition of the faith. Its intention was not to add anything, or to substitute a new doctrine, but to declare, as against Nestorianism and Eutychianism in particular, the age-long faith of the church, received from the apostles and evangelists, concerning the Son of God. The Chalcedonian Formulary or Definition runs as follows:

> 'We confess and all teach with one accord, One and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once perfect in Godhead and perfect in Manhood, truly God and truly Man, and further, of a reasonable soul and body, of one substance with the Father as regards His Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards His Manhood, in all respects like unto us, except sin. As regards His Godhead, begotten before the ages, but yet as regards His Manhood, on account of us and our salvation, begotten in the last days of Mary the Virgin, bearer of God; One and the same Christ,

> Son, Lord, Only begotten, proclaimed in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures being in no way destroyed on account of the union, but rather the peculiar property of each being preserved and combining to form one Person, and one Hypostasis.'

The formulary gained universal acceptance, and though Eutychianism in a modified form, *i.e.* Monophysitism, survived in new modes of thought and expression (and still exists in the Coptic church of Egypt, and in Abyssinia and S. India), the great body of Catholic Christians realized that this utterance was only the expression in technical language of that which had been believed of Christ from the beginning.

During the first three hundred years of her life the pagan world had asked the church precisely the same question as her Master had asked the Pharisees—'What think ye of Christ?' and the answer had consistently been 'He is both God and Man,' though as yet no formal explanation was forthcoming. For one hundred and seventy years, from 319 to 451 A.D., churchmen had asked each other the same question, and at last, at Chalcedon, a complete answer was given, an answer in harmony with the gospel narrative, the teaching of the early missionaries, and the consensus of all faithful people from the beginning of the church's life. Christ is truly God, perfectly Man, one Person without separation, of two natures without confusion. The importance of the doctrine can hardly be over-estimated, and something was said about it at the beginning of this chapter. If Christ is not God the ultimate sanctions of Christianity are destroyed, its claims preposterous, its founder a self-

deceived dupe or a shameless impostor. And equally, if Christ is not Man, the gulf between God and man is yet unbridged; there is no union possible between sinful man and the majesty and holiness of God; man is in no better position than he was when Mithra offered to him a share in the mysteries of the Sun-God.

NOTE ON THE WORD 'OECUMENICAL'

The word Oecumenical, which is applied to certain councils of the Church, needs some explanation. It is derived from the Greek word ἡ οἰκουμένη, meaning 'the inhabited world,' and as applied to councils it signifies those councils, certain decrees of which have been universally accepted as binding upon all Christians. No council could properly be called oecumenical at the moment of its session; nor could any one of its decrees be regarded as possessing oecumenical authority when it was first promulgated The test of oecumenicity is that *in the end* the whole Church accepted the authority of a particular council, or of certain of its decrees, as being in accordance with the age-long teaching or practice of the Church. The point is well illustrated in the history of the Council of Nicaea. As we have seen, that council declared that Christ is of the same substance with the Father; but the statement was not immediately accepted. It was only after long reasoning and bitter strife, extending over sixty years, that churchmen finally agreed that the word *homoousios* most nearly expressed the truth about Christ's divinity. It was the subsequent ratifying consent of the whole Church, declared at Constantinople in 381, at Ephesus in 431, and at Chalcedon in 451, and not afterwards seriously questioned, which gave to this decree of Nicaea the status of oecumenicity. And so it is with the other councils, or decrees of councils, which are commonly called oecumenical. A council may postulate some doctrine, or draw up a new formulary to explain an

old truth, but it is not till the verdict of the whole Church has pronounced it to be in accord with Scripture and the tradition of the apostles, that it can receive that authority which binds it upon the consciences of christian men.

The whole question is admirably summarized in Dr. Darwell Stone's *Outlines of Christian Dogma*, pp. 132 and 133, and note 40 on page 313.

EMPERORS		POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS EVENTS	POPES OF ROME
323. CONSTANTINE.		323. Defeat of Licinius.	314–335. SYLVESTER I.
WEST.	EAST.		
337–340. CONSTANTINE II. in Gaul.			336. MARCUS I.
337–350. CONSTANS in Italy.	337–61. CONSTANTIUS.		337. JULIUS I.
			352. LIBERIUS.
350. CONSTANTIUS (Sole Emperor).		357. Publication of the Sirmian Blasphemy.	
361. JULIAN (Sole Emperor).		Attempted revival of Paganism.	
363. JOVIAN (Sole Emperor).		Restoration of Christianity.	
WEST.	EAST.		
364. VALENTINIAN I.	VALENS.	Division of the Empire.	366. DAMASUS.
375. GRATIAN.	379. THEODOSIUS I.	378. Battle of Adrianople.	
			384. SIRICIUS.
392. THEODOSIUS I. (Sole Emperor).			
395. HONORIUS.	ARCADIUS. 408. THEODOSIUS II.		401. INNOCENT I.
		410. Sack of Rome by Alaric.	
		415. Death penalty on Donatists.	417. ZOSIMUS.
			418. BONIFACE I.
			422. CELESTINE I.
425. VALENTINIAN III.			
			432. SIXTUS III.
			440. LEO THE GREAT.
		441. Vandals in Africa.	
455–475. Period of Anarchy.	450. MARCIAN.	451. Attila invades Italy. Battle of Châlons.	
		455. Genseric the Vandal sacks Rome.	
	474. ZENO.		461. HILARIUS.
475. ROMULUS AUGUSTULUS.		Fall of Western Empire.	

COUNCILS, ETC.	CHIEF ORTHODOX WRITERS.	CHIEF HERETICAL EXPONENTS.
325. 1st Council of Nicaea.	*c.* 297–373. Athanasius.	Arius (died 337).
	336. 1st Exile of Athanasius.	Eusebius of Caesarea, historian and semi-Arian (died 340).
343. Councils of Sardica and Philippopolis.	339. 2nd Exile of Athanasius.	Eusebius of Nicomedia (died 343).
	356. 3rd Exile of Athanasius.	
362. Council of Alexandria.	362. 4th Exile of Athanasius.	
		c. 360. Macedonius of Constantinople.
	362–381. The Cappadocian Fathers: Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa.	
365. Council of Lampsacus.		
	340–397. Ambrose of Milan.	
	365. 5th Exile of Athanasius.	
379. Council of Antioch.		*c.* 370. Apollinarius of Laodicea.
381. 1st Council of Constantinople.	347–402. John Chrysostom.	
		384. Theodore of Mopsuestia.
	404. Innocent's 'Liber Regularum.'	
	410. Augustine begins 'De Civitate Dei.'	*c.* 411–431. Pelagius.
	412–444. Cyril of Alexandria.	
		c. 427. Nestorius.
	420. St. Jerome died.	
431. Council of Ephesus.		
	431. Augustine of Hippo died.	
		c. 448. Eutyche
449. The Robber Council.	449. The Tome of St. Leo.	
451. Council of Chalcedon.		

CHAPTER IX

EARLY MONASTICISM

Professor Foakes-Jackson says : [1] 'Probably without monasticism there would have been no chance of Christianity surviving the Dark Ages with sufficient vitality to create a new civilisation.' It is worth while to put this estimate of the ultimate value of early and mediaeval monasticism at the beginning of this chapter, for few Christian institutions have been so consistently and unmitigatingly condemned as the monastic system of the later middle ages. It is true that though the picture of sloth, frivolity, and intrigue among the religious Orders has been often overdrawn, there is considerable evidence in support of it, and the reader is in danger of approaching the study of its early days with a biased judgment, due to his knowledge of its decline and corruption in the centuries immediately preceding the Reformation. Strange excesses were practised by some of the early hermits, but they were never encouraged by the church. The organized communities established by Basil of Caesarea in the East, and Benedict of Nursia in the West, were based upon common-sense principles ; the welfare of the whole church was their concern, and they did much to keep alive the zeal of earlier days and to encourage the missionary activity, which had flagged to some extent

[1] *Outline of Christianity* (ed. by Peake and Parsons), vol. ii. p. 97.

after the great expansion of the first three centuries. An example of this last point comes readily to the mind in the history of early Christianity in these islands ; for all practical purposes it may be said that England owes her knowledge of the Gospel, and of ordered Christian life, to monks. Celtic Christianity in the North came from Irish monks, led by Patrick and Columba, and their followers, Aidan and Chad ; and in the South, Augustine brought the Faith to the kingdom of Kent, from the Benedictine monastery in Rome.

The ascetic ideal was not a new thing in the world ; in the older religions of the East men had withdrawn themselves from the society of their fellows to learn more of the wisdom of the Infinite, or to practise severe austerities, sometimes because they believed that all matter was evil, sometimes because, by a life of extraordinary self-mortification, they hoped to attract disciples, and so, the more easily, to propagate their opinions. Until the middle of the third century there is no evidence of a Christian asceticism other than that discipline of self, and obedience to common rule, which all the baptized must practise. But from the time of Paul of Thebes (in Egypt, *c.* 251 A.D.), the first Christian hermits, men and women, began to leave their homes and to go out into the desert, to live in solitude, that they might give themselves uninterruptedly to spiritual exercises.

Reasons for the appearance of this kind of life in the century which lies between the Decian persecution and the beginning of the rule of Constantius as sole Emperor are not far to seek. There was no persecution of a serious kind between 251 and 303 A.D. and Christianity was established as the favoured religion in 313 A.D. Thus, with the sense of security which the long peace and the

final triumph brought, there came about, almost inevitably, a lowering of the Christian standard. Christian life between 150 and 200 A.D. is in sharp contrast with that which is described by contemporary writers between 250 and 300 A.D. The Christian of the first period lived in fear of his life ; to profess Christianity was a dangerous thing. But his grandson or great grandson, born of Christian parents, and knowing nothing of persecution except what was told him of ' the long ago,' found that even the most prominent positions in the State were sometimes held by men of his own religion, that bishops were great men with social dignity and prestige, and that in general Christian life was comfortable and hardly more risky than that of his pagan neighbours. Some of the more thoughtful Christians looked with grave suspicion and disappointment upon the steady secularization of the church, and, as a protest, went out into the wilderness to seek that simplicity and severity of life which had been characteristic of their own fathers, and, as they believed, of Christ and His apostles. The ' Peace of the Church ' still further enhanced the dangers from this secularization. Pagans crowded into the fellowship of the favoured religion without real conversion of heart. Thus it was more than ever possible to live a life of real comfort and still profess obedience to the Man of Sorrows, and in the face of the luxury of the age the ascetic ideal gained ground rapidly, the number of hermits increasing enormously between 313 and 360 A.D.

It may well be argued that, by running away from their fellows, in order to make sure of their own salvation, the ascetics were pursuing a selfish policy and one calculated to weaken the whole church, at a time when she was called upon to engage in a new and strenuous warfare against

the world. It would surely have been more courageous and of greater value had they remained, and lived among their neighbours, following out, in their normal avocations, the life of high moral purpose, of sobriety and discipline, which they sought to practise in the seclusion of the desert. There is much good sense in such a line of argument; but two things need to be borne in mind. The spirit of adventure lurks in nearly every man, and craves for satisfaction in some way or other; in Stephenson it found its outlet in experiments with the power of steam; the Elizabethan seamen singed the King of Spain's beard; Columbus set sail westward to find a new passage to the East Indies; the crusaders rode across Europe, on gaily caparisoned steeds, to meet new dangers and excitements in the land of Christ's nativity; the Christian of the fourth century, no longer having beasts to fight in the arena, went out to the desert, the haunt of wild beasts and, as it was believed, of demons in animal guise, to fight a spiritual warfare against the kingdom of the evil one. It is the spirit of adventure in all ages which drives men to new and sometimes surprising modes of life. But it was not only adventure; no less continually, as the centuries pass, men have sought for quiet times of contemplation, when they may meet God, as it were, face to face, and commune with Him as Abraham did. In the turmoil of the Church's new found liberty and popularity, the world and its affairs pressed so hardly upon Christians, that times for quiet seemed impossible of attainment when living the common life of citizenship; the call to seek God in the wide spaces of the desert, far from the noise of human habitation, drove the mystic, irresistibly, to leave his home and native city, and live in retirement from the busy world of human activity.

A further cause, encouraging the life of seclusion and separation, was the growth of church organization. To some it seemed that the increasing rigidity in worship and discipline (not in the ascetic sense) was out of harmony with the freedom of earlier days, and left little room for individual expression ; so they endeavoured to escape from it, and return to more primitive methods of Christian life, in this way. Such considerations may well have been of primary importance in the third century ; they would hardly weigh so heavily in the fourth century, and in later days had no influence at all on the growth of monastic life.

THE HERMITS OF EGYPT

The Egyptian desert was the first home of Christian hermits, and the founder of this kind of life is generally believed to have been Paul of Thebes, as has already been said. Little is known of him ; but his successor, St. Antony, attained a world-wide reputation in his own lifetime, which extended over one hundred and five years. He was born in Egypt in 251 A.D., of wealthy parents, and as a child avoided the society of children of his own age and could not be persuaded to go to school, so that all his life he was an unlearned person. Hearing one day the reading of the Gospel story of the young man who came to Christ, having great possessions which he was bidden to sell, Antony determined to obey the call literally in his own life. Selling all that he had he retired to live the life of an ascetic, first in a tomb at some distance from his home, and later, in the ruins of an old castle, in the midst of that wild and terrible desert which lies between the Nile and the Red Sea. There he lived for upwards of twenty years entirely alone, seeing no one, never leaving the cell he had made for himself in the ruins, but spending

his whole time in prayer and fasting, in rigorous discipline of the body, and in fierce conflict with demons, who assailed him on all sides and offered him in turn the delights of the world and the flesh, or the horrors of bloody contests with wild beasts. So his biographers tell us. But the fame of this saintly if eccentric servant of God could not be hid; others inspired by his example, though, no doubt, many different motives animated them, followed Antony to the desert. At last, one day his hiding place was besieged by 'a multitude' of hermits who had settled near his dwelling, and he was compelled to forsake his utter solitude and organize, not a communal life, but some general kind of rule under which all the hermits of the neighbourhood might live, and yet preserve their separateness from their fellows. Antony lived till 356 A.D., twice visiting Alexandria, where he met Athanasius and laid the foundation of that friendship which the Egyptian solitaries always extended to the Patriarch in his successive exiles. During one of these exiles Athanasius wrote a life of Antony.

A great number of men and women felt that they were called to a life of separation, but for most of them the absolute seclusion and isolation of the hermits was unendurable; they desired to cut themselves off from the entanglements and restlessness of the world, or to find new spiritual foes to fight, but they could not live entirely alone. Some of those who attempted to do so went mad; some inflicted upon themselves almost unbelievable tortures; some utterly broke down and returned to the world to live a life of debauchery—a reaction against their unnatural austerities. So under the wise direction of Pachomius, himself at first a hermit, a new form of ascetic life grew up. He is the founder of the coenobitic

system, *i.e.* a life lived in common, under a rule ; and this is the form of monasticism which is the best known and became universal, and of which there are so many examples in the ruins of great Religious houses, scattered throughout England to-day.

Pachomius was born a pagan, and during his military service he had come into contact with Christians, with the result that, upon his discharge from the army (*c.* 314 A.D.) he was baptized and went out into the desert, putting himself under the direction of a hermit. But it was not long before he began to realize how great were the difficulties and dangers, both spiritual and moral, which beset the solitary ; so while still preserving the ideal of a life of separateness, he gathered together groups of hermits who abandoned their utter isolation, and shared a common life of worship and of work. Clearly this new form of the ascetic ideal met a real need ; within his own lifetime (he died in 346), Pachomius established nine monasteries for men, and his sister Mary during the same period founded two houses, on similar lines, for women. His rule has been the basis of all subsequent community foundations ; it is therefore worth our while to consider it in some detail.

It was very simple ; it was based upon common sense ; and it was made endurable, since extreme and eccentric forms of asceticism were discouraged. The monastery was enclosed in an area of ground which contained several houses, each of them being the dwelling-place of about forty monks. Idleness was avoided, for the monks occupied their time in manual labour and the study of the Scriptures. They earned their living by the pursuit of some useful trade, and presumably monks were allotted their quarters in the different houses within the monastery

according to their craft. They learnt by heart the Psalter and the New Testament, and their worship (they met thrice daily for common prayer) consisted largely of the recitation of psalms. They were allowed to make their own arrangements for food, and while eating always covered their heads with their hoods; this strange custom may have been due to a sense that in some way the act of eating was unseemly, or that thereby their individual privations were less noticeable to their companions.

Unlike the system prevalent in later foundations, no vows were taken; those who came and lived under the rule and plied their trade were free to leave again if they so desired; nor was the movement definitely clerical. Most of Pachomius' monks were laymen of all ranks and professions, tailors, smiths, carpenters, lawyers. His houses were a refuge for all who wished to escape from the world and live in more intimate union with God while still carrying on their normal occupations. Thus there was fostered a sense of the dignity of labour; hitherto manual work had been regarded as suitable only for the slave class; the monks, by their industry, taught the much needed lesson that labour is honourable in all men, whether bond or free.

Community life, however, did not supersede the hermit life from which it had sprung; Egypt and parts of Syria were full of solitary ascetics during the fourth and fifth centuries, and some of them practised the most extraordinary austerities. Perhaps the most famous of these is Simon Stylites (388-460 A.D.). He was a native of Antioch, and as a young man had been a shepherd. He entered a monastery, but desirous of inflicting upon himself a discipline altogether incompatible with community life, he went out to live alone as a hermit, and soon

attracted attention to himself by his eccentricities. He would remain standing erect for weeks at a time; he passed the whole of Lent neither eating nor drinking; and for some time he was fastened by a chain to a bare wall of rock. When he was persuaded to abandon his chain, he exchanged this form of mortification for another, by which he is best known, and from which he derives his name, 'Stylites'—'a pillar dweller.' He had a column of stone, sixty feet high, built for himself, and on the top of it he lived and received his visitors, and from it he preached to the crowds who came to see this wonder. His fame spread throughout the Christian world and beyond, for wandering Bedouins came to see and consult him, regarding him as a divine being. In spite of many official protests against these abnormal austerities, Simon remained on his pillar till his death, and, later, the column was enclosed in a great church whose ruins can still be seen, between Antioch and Aleppo. He is not the only example of what are known as 'pillar saints,' but he was the first to practise this most unusual form of bodily discipline, and is the best known of them all.

MONASTICISM IN THE GREEK WORLD

The name of Basil of Caesarea, in Cappadocia, is bound up with the development of the monastic life in the Greek world. Basil was born of Christian parents, his father was a rhetorician, his grandparents had been confessors for the Faith. He was educated at Athens, where he met Julian, afterwards Emperor, and Gregory Nazianzen, his close companion of later days, and he was destined to follow his father's profession. He was a brilliant teacher, much sought after by his fellow citizens, so that, yielding

to pride, he was in danger of giving up his religion to devote himself entirely to pursuits calculated to bring him worldly advantage. His sister, Macrina, realized how strong were the temptations which beset him, and persuaded him to abandon his work as a lecturer and to go out into the desert to study the monastic life. He travelled through Egypt and Syria, visiting the community houses, and the most renowned hermits, studying their manner of life, and weighing the merits of their differing systems, one against another. When he returned to Caesarea in 358 A.D. he was entirely converted to the monastic ideal, though at first he preferred the eremitic method. As soon as possible he retired from Caesarea and lived as a hermit with a few companions near him, though he was not allowed to remain in undisturbed solitude. The Arian controversy was entering upon its closing stages, and Basil was frequently recalled from his retreat to take part in the discussions which went on continually between the Semi-Arians and the Catholics. We have already noticed his work in this connection,[1] and need not enlarge upon it further ; he was ordained priest in 362 A.D. and elected to the bishopric of Caesarea in 370 A.D.

Basil's great gifts of intellect and capacity for organization sufficiently account for his forsaking of the hermit life in order to build up a society of ascetics modelled upon the Rule of Pachomius. The solitaries of Syria, of whom the most famous is Eustathius of Sebaste, had indulged in the most extravagant, and in some ways undesirable forms of mortification, and were frowned upon by authority ; it was hardly likely that a man of Basil's temperament would wish to follow their example. So between the

[1] *Vide supra*, pp. 207-8.

years 358 and 370 A.D. he organized a Rule which spread rapidly through the Greek world, and differs little from the monasticism of the West, with which we are more familiar.

There are four chief points in his Rule which are worth attention. (1) He emphasized the importance of learning and made it part of the duty of his monks to engage in regular study. The unlettered life of the solitary was often a cause of the strange excesses and odd devotional practices which from time to time brought discredit upon early monasticism. (2) In close alliance with learning, and to avoid dangers arising through ignorance, he insisted that the ordinary spiritual rules of prayer and sacrament should be observed in his houses. The Christian living in the world was expected to take part in public worship with his fellows ; he made his Communion at regular times and shared in common the spiritual no less than the social life of the Christian congregation in his town. St. Paul's vision of the church as a corporate body made up of many individuals, dependent one upon another, had laid firm hold upon Christian imagination and had bound believers together in closest union in the days of persecution. But the solitary was in danger of losing sight of this vital element in Christianity. In his isolation he was entirely unable to take a part in the corporate life, and there was always the risk lest, as sometimes happened, he should so entirely separate himself as to lose all interest in the church at large, and live without sacraments, a life which became progressively less normal and healthy as he abandoned more completely the ordinary means of grace. So Basil made the devotional life of his monks centre round their common worship, as Pachomius had done.

(3) And, again following Pachomius, he combined

spiritual and intellectual activities with labour of a purely practical kind, though it was more congruous with their calling, perhaps, than that of the Egyptian foundations. He planted his monastery close to Caesarea and connected with it schools and hospital work. So by his Rule those who lived apart from the world were still intimately associated with certain aspects of it, and not only to a large extent was laziness avoided, but the monk, by intercourse with sufferers and those seeking knowledge, could not lose the human touch, and with it his sanity. (4) The solitaries of Egypt presented grave problems from time to time, both to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Theodosius I. complained to St. Ambrose, '*Monachi multa scelera faciunt*,' and there is no doubt that some of them created disturbances, or lost sight of the ordinary moral standards, causing scandals by the strange excesses which were, so often, the product of a mind diseased by abnormal austerities. Bishops, too, were puzzled to know how to deal with those who cut themselves off from the ordinary disciplinary regulations of the church, becoming a law to themselves. Basil realized how great was the need for some regulating authority, above the individual monk, or even the head of a religious house ; as bishop, he appreciated the difficulty caused by men and women in his diocese who spent their lives outside the influences of organized Christianity. So he laid it down in his Rule that all monasteries must be subject to the oversight of the bishop in whose diocese they were situated. The wisdom of this provision, which Basil was the first to make, was afterwards recognized by the whole church, for the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) directed that, for the future, the consent of the bishop must always be obtained before a monastery could be established in his diocese,

and that all priest members of a community must be immediately under episcopal authority and control.

Thus Basil laid the foundations of community life for the Greek world with the wisdom born of knowledge gained in his travels, and with an insight into human nature, which were of the utmost value to the future of monasticism. We shall leave the history of its growth in the East at this point and turn our attention westwards to Jerome and Benedict; but we shall find that Basil's Rule was the general model of West no less than East, and we are justified in speaking of him as the father of that community life which spread over Europe in the middle ages.

MONASTICISM IN THE WEST

The monastic ideal took root later and grew more slowly in the West, following the natural differences of temperament between Eastern and Western peoples. The Church of Rome had always been essentially practical in outlook and had emphasized the corporate side of Christianity and its value as a source of strength to the individual, perhaps more strongly than the great churches of the East. It was thus natural that the idea of individual separation from the life of the body should grow more slowly and meet with official discouragement; in any case there was little in common between the passionate Egyptian, with his almost unlimited capacity for extravagance in religion, and the calm level-headedness of the natives of the greatest city in the world, a city which in the past had built up her life upon the twin virtues of public duty and personal sobriety. There were a few societies of 'consecrated virgins' from quite early days, and probably from time to time men went out to live the

solitary life ; but there is no Roman counterpart to St. Antony. From its beginning in the West, the religious life was based upon community rules, and the closer intercourse between the Eastern and Western churches during the Arian struggle was responsible for its introduction to Rome.

Athanasius brought two monks with him when he came to the imperial city in 339 A.D. He spent the eight years of his second exile in Rome, thus having opportunities to familiarize the Roman church with this, to them, new method of serving Christ. Ambrose, who was bishop of Milan from 374 to 397 A.D., encouraged its growth still further ; Milan had many affinities with the East, and Ambrose had an opportunity, which was probably unique at the time, of learning about the chief developments of Eastern Christianity. Martin, the soldier saint, and bishop of Tours from 372 to 397 A.D., fostered it in Gaul ; he was a native of Pannonia and a friend of Ambrose, and may have learnt of the monastic ideal through him. At all events his zeal and energy brought him many followers, and it is said that when he died, more than two thousand monks followed his body to the grave. Jerome (345-430 A.D.) did much to kindle enthusiasm for it in Rome itself ; he had been given a Greek translation of the Rule of Pachomius and tried to establish it in the West. He was successful in persuading certain high born Roman ladies to retire from the world and devote themselves to a life of prayer and good works ; but his violent temper and his vulgar and unwarrantable attack upon the married clergy of Rome made him so unpopular that he was compelled to flee from the city. He founded two religious houses, one for monks and one for nuns, in Bethlehem, but after his departure from Rome

interest again flagged. It was not until nearly the end of the fifth century that Western monasticism became a real force in the church, owing to the zeal of Benedict of Nursia.

Benedict was born at Nursia about 480 A.D. and was sent to Rome to be educated, but at the age of twelve years he fled from the world to seek God in the retirement of a cave at Subiaco. Here he lived, unknown, for three years, but he was at last discovered by some shepherds whom he instructed, and, by miracles which his biographer, Gregory the Great, narrates, began to attract followers, eventually being asked to preside over a monastic institution which had grown up under his influence. Some of those who had put themselves under his direction, resented the strictness of the rule which he had drawn up for their guidance, and attempted to poison him, but in vain, and his fame so quickly spread that he presently established twelve religious houses, each containing twelve men, and each presided over by an abbot. His enemies, however, moved by envy, determined to get rid of him by any means, even murder, if no other way could be found ; so Benedict, realizing that peace was impossible in such an atmosphere, left Subiaco about 528 A.D. with a few faithful companions and founded a monastic house at Monte Cassino, about one hundred miles south of Rome, in the Apennine range of mountains. Here he built up his Rule, famous throughout Western Christendom as the ' Rule of St. Benet ' ; and though after his death the house was sacked by Goths from Lombardy and the Order temporarily housed in Rome (580 A.D.), it was rebuilt, and is still regarded as the Mother house of the Benedictine Order. His sister Scholastica founded a house for women near her brother's monastery, and based

the rule for her nuns upon that of the Benedictine monks.

Benedict laid no claim to originality in the rule which he devised; he modelled it upon that of earlier community establishments, drawing upon both Pachomius and St. Basil. But he realized that austerities, bearable, and perhaps less unnatural to Easterns in a warm climate, were impossible, and sometimes even abhorrent, to Europeans; so his Rule is conspicuous for its sound common sense, its appreciation of the capacities and limitations of humanity, and its practical usefulness. The following are the most interesting points of the Rule:

(1) Each monastery was to be self-contained, presided over by an abbot, who was supreme in his own house. There was no idea of founding a great Order in which many houses were linked together under one Superior General, as was the case in later days with the Cluniac monks. The rule of the Order was one, but each house was independent of its neighbours.

(2) Monks were to live under the threefold, lifelong vow of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, and great stress was laid upon the third of these, as being at once the foundation and keystone of the Rule. Men who joined the community, took the vows, and then departed to the world again, were regarded as renegades, whereas in the rule of Pachomius, they had been free to leave if they wished. Thus the monastic calling became a lifelong profession.

(3) Coenobitic life was more strictly enforced than heretofore. The monks were to spend their whole lives in common; they prayed together, they worked together, they fed at a common table, and slept in a common dormitory. But there were few opportunities for conversation; work time and meals were passed in silence, and no speech

was allowed after Compline, the last service of the day. Thus dangers, arising from gossip and idle or frivolous talk, were reduced to a minimum.

(4) Sloth had already been the curse of the monk, as it proved to be also in later days ; but Benedict's Rule did much to prevent it. Almost the whole of the day was definitely occupied in duties of some kind. About four and a half hours were spent in the chapel of the monastery, in the eight services, ' Hours ' as they were called, which consisted mainly of the recitation of the Psalter, which was repeated in its entirety once every week. Seven hours a day were devoted to manual labour of all kinds (this included study) ; certain times were set apart for the reading of devotional books or the learning of passages of Scripture, and especially the Psalms ; and finally, lest the monks should indulge too sweetly in sleep, they were bidden to rise from their beds two hours after midnight, and repeat together in chapel the office of Matins.

Other points in the Rule, of less immediate interest or usefulness, were concerned with the dietary of the house, which was to be severely simple, though adequate ; the forbidding of any personal austerity without permission of the abbot (this avoided the dangers springing from eccentricity) ; and the provision of hospitality towards strangers, and especially towards the poor.

Such a rule of life may seem strangely severe to Englishmen of the twentieth century, who are for the most part quite unfamiliar with the monastic ideal and manner of living ; but that the Benedictine Rule was based upon common-sense principles, and was by no means unendurable, is sufficiently attested by the spread of the Order and its subsequent influence throughout Western Christendom. Within the founder's lifetime houses had been

established in Gaul, Sicily, and Spain, and spread with remarkable rapidity over Europe, absorbing almost every form of monasticism then practised, except for an occasional hermit here and there. Fifty years after his death the first Benedictine house in England was founded by Augustine, in Canterbury.

VALUE OF MONASTICISM TO THE CHURCH

Here our consideration of Monasticism must close, but it is worth while to end this chapter with an estimate of the value of the Religious Life to the Church. For this purpose it is necessary to carry our minds forward far beyond its early beginnings, and to remember that though many different Orders grew up in subsequent centuries, such as the Cluniacs, Carthusians, and Cistercians, yet in the main the rule and purpose of St. Benedict animated them all. Distinctions in their Rule do not vitiate our general estimate of their worth.

In the confused and barbarous days which are commonly called the 'Dark Ages,' and in hardly less degree, when Western Christendom had settled down to live by the political theories involved in all that is meant by 'The Empire and the Papacy,' the debt to monastic life is almost incalculable. In spite of the eccentricities of some of its earliest exponents, in spite of the undoubted scandals of sloth and greed in later days, it is yet very difficult to see how the cause of true religion would have been maintained in many political and social upheavals, before we pass from the mediaeval to the modern age. Practically all that is best in the devotional life of the church comes from the Cloister; the music, the ceremonial, and much of the phraseology of the prayers owe their inspiration to men who lived apart from the world,

in a life wholly dedicated to God. Almost all the educational work of Europe was undertaken by monastic houses; at Canterbury, Theodore (Archbp. 669-690) founded a school in connection with the Benedictine monastery which Augustine had established there; Aidan had a school at Lindisfarne for boys, whom he and his companions trained to be missionaries to their fellow countrymen; Bede, the first English historian, spent the whole of his life, from his seventh year, in the monastery at Jarrow; and in later days Universities, and notably Oxford, grew up under the auspices of the teaching Orders.

In the Dark Ages all missionary work was undertaken by monks, and though instances of their evangelistic activity among heathen are too numerous to mention, it will be remembered that Celtic monks evangelized the North of England, and Italian monks from the Benedictine house in Rome, the southern half of our country. In like manner, until the Reformation, the care of the sick and the relief of those in need was the work of the Religious Orders. All, except the enclosed houses like the Carthusians, had hospitals attached to them, and many houses had laboratories in which experiments in the healing of disease were carried out, and valuable medical discoveries made.

In humbler ways, also, they played a useful part in the social life of Europe. They made roads, drained marsh lands, and stimulated agriculture, often introducing new and improved methods of farming. In the North of England the great Cistercian houses were an integral factor in the wool trade of the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, because they owned large sheep walks, and by skilful management brought great profit to the merchants of East Anglia as well as to themselves.

Their rule of hospitality to strangers, and especially to the poor, did much to relieve the chronic poverty of the oppressed villein class in feudal days. No doubt their charity was abused, and idle, worthless fellows traded upon their obligation to dispense charity, in order to escape the unpleasant necessity of working for their own living. But it is a significant fact that after the dissolution of the monasteries in England, vagrancy became so widespread (and it cannot, by a computation of numbers, be entirely ascribed to the presence of wandering monks turned out of their homes) that the State had to take new measures for the relief of the indigent, and the great Poor Law of 1601 was enacted.

Times have changed, and with the advance of modern civilization much of the practical work of the Orders has everywhere passed into other hands; public, organized charity, or the State itself, is responsible for hospitals and schools, the alleviation of poverty, and works of public utility. Thus the value of the monastic ideal in the twentieth century may with some reason be brought into question on its more secular side, and this is not the place to discuss the worth of its spiritual witness. But in less enlightened days much of what was good and profitable to humanity had its home in the monastery, and the Gospel teaching of the dignity of labour, the duty of charity, and the necessity of high ideals of life and conduct, were preserved for men of later days by the cloistered monks of mediaeval Europe.

NOTE

A very entertaining and readable account of the ordinary life of a monastery will be found in *The Home of the Monk*, by D. H. S. Cranage, published by the Cambridge

University Press (1926). It deals only with English houses and describes in detail architectural features, but it is well worth reading.

SOME DATES IN THE HISTORY OF MONASTICISM

251. Paul of Thebes.
c. 251-356. St. Antony.
314. Pachomius joins the Hermits.
358-370. Establishment of the Rule of St. Basil at Caesarea.
c. 372-397. St. Martin of Tours.
345-430. St. Jerome.
388-460. Simon Stylites.
480-545. St. Benedict of Nursia.

CHAPTER X

THE RISE OF THE PAPACY AND THE COMING OF THE GOTH

'THE coronation of Charles is not only the central event of the middle ages, it is also one of those very few events of which, taking them singly, it may be said, that if they had not happened, the history of the world would have been different.' Thus Bryce begins his estimate of the importance of that event in St. Peter's, Rome, when, on Christmas Day, 800 A.D., Pope Leo III. 'placed upon the brow of the barbarian chieftain, the diadem of the Caesars,' and Charles was hailed by the congregation there assembled: 'To Charles Augustus, crowned by God, the great and peace-giving Emperor, be life and victory.' [1]

If there is a difficulty in saying of any one event, that if it had not happened the history of the world would have been different, it is far more difficult to pass the same judgment upon a movement. But the history of the papacy is like the coronation of Charles the Great; if it had not grown and developed at Rome, the history of the world would have been different. Looking back over the long centuries of Christian life, it is impossible to think of any of the great sees of the early church as being able to

[1] Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, chap. v. p. 50, and chap. iv. p. 49.

establish for themselves a position of prestige and importance, such as we are familiar with at Rome. There was a moment when the threat of a papacy on the Nile caused some anxiety to the political rulers of the Empire. Byzantium, New Rome, was always jealous of her elder sister on the banks of the Tiber, and this rivalry lay at the root of the quarrel which led to the final separation between East and West in 1054 A.D. But there was never any serious possibility that Alexandria or Constantinople would be able to dominate ecclesiastical politics, as Rome has dominated them, almost from the beginning of her history. We are justified, therefore, in saying that if the papacy had not grown up at Rome, it could have grown up nowhere else, and the history of the world would have been different.

Rome was the centre of the world when Christianity was first preached, and though political events in the fourth and following centuries caused the centre of gravity to shift, now to Constantinople, now to Ravenna, and finally to the Frankish kingdom, she never lost the prestige she had gained when the Empire was first established by Augustus.

The imperial city was a magnet to St. Paul; he longed for the day when he might see Rome and 'impart some spiritual benefit' to the infant church there. The ordered government, the universality of its authority, the dignity of its citizenship, inspired his vision of the one, universal church, living under ordered government, embracing in its fellowship men of every colour and nationality. It was natural, and indeed inevitable, that Christians should turn their eyes to that city whence all authority in law and government proceeded, and that, in later days, their habit of looking to Rome

politically should include looking to her in ecclesiastical matters also. Just as St. Paul's, London, and not Canterbury Cathedral, is the religious home of Englishmen, because it is situated in the capital, so from very early times the political importance of Rome gave a dignity and authority to the church founded within her walls, which of itself would outweigh almost every other consideration.

But there were other reasons also which account for its unique position in Christian history. Christianity had been planted in the city in very early days. There is no documentary evidence about its foundation, but it cannot have been much later than 50 A.D., for when St. Paul came to Corinth (*c.* 52 A.D.) he found a Christian and his wife, Aquila and Priscilla, 'lately come from Italy'; and when he himself wrote his letter to the Romans (*c.* 58 A.D.), he speaks so warmly of them as a church 'whose faith is spoken of throughout the whole world' (Romans i. 8), that it was clearly already pre-eminent among the congregations which the apostle either founded or visited. We may take it as practically certain that St. Peter visited Rome and worked there for some time. A tradition so early, so consistently referred to, never denied, and so universally believed, has, to the historian, an authority little less than that of the written word. The difficulty is, not to believe that he worked there, but to fix accurately the time he spent in the city, his coming there, and the date of his martyrdom. A very early tradition maintains that St. Peter and St. Paul suffered martyrdom there on the same day, during the Neronian persecution in 64 A.D. It is not easy to make this date agree with other facts in St. Peter's life, and we need not trouble about it here; both apostles, in all probability, did suffer in Rome, though not perhaps together, and there is no reason to

doubt that the claim of the Roman Christians to possess their bodies is true. Their tombs were pointed out to visitors, and became places of pilgrimage at an early date. Had Peter died anywhere but in Rome, it is certain that the Christians of that place would have proudly claimed the possession of his burial-place. That Rome should be the scene of Peter's labours and death, and his last resting place, naturally increased the prestige of the Roman church : from the beginning, Peter had been looked upon as an apostle of special pre-eminence and authority, and it is easy to see how, even as early as the third century, the bishops of Rome began to assert their authority as successors of St. Peter.

The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. has an important bearing upon the ensuing prominence of Rome. In the first years Jerusalem was naturally the centre of church life. James, 'the Lord's brother,' presided over the Christian community, and had taken the chair at the council held there in 49 or 50 A.D. St. Paul appealed to 'the church at Jerusalem' for guidance in various problems which confronted him in his labours, and from time to time returned thither to meet 'the brethren' and report upon his missionary activities. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, Jerusalem appears as the Mother church. But when, after the sack of the city, the Christians fled to Pella, they failed to establish their new home as the central church of Christendom, and men sought for a new centre, as it was natural that they should, in Rome, the heart of the Empire. There is an ingrained desire in man for a rallying point and an easily recognized leader, whether it be a person or a place ; we noticed this in an earlier chapter in connection with the growth of the official ministry of the church. It

was inevitable that Christians should seek for a new focus of organized life when the Holy City was destroyed, and only Rome could supply that need. No other church—not even Ephesus—had an equal claim, for no other city was hallowed as Jerusalem was, or universally recognized in the political world, as was Rome ; so the chief city of the Empire became the seat of the first church of Christendom.

INTERNAL CONDITIONS OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

The internal conditions of the Roman church of early days were favourable to a rapid advance in prestige, no less than her political importance in the world. It was her fortune to be ruled by a succession of wise and capable bishops, who guided their flock, in times of extraordinary danger and difficulty, with great skill and courage. Clement, who held the see during the persecution of Domitian (96 A.D.), is an example of this efficiency ; he was one of the first sub-apostolic writers, and as was natural to one brought up in the imperial city, he interested himself in the affairs of the whole church, taking the broad, Pauline view of her universality. His successors followed his example and played an increasingly important part in matters of general interest to the Christian communities scattered so widely over the Empire ; so it came to be that the opinion of Rome was often sought by bishops of other cities and respectfully considered, if not always followed.

Throughout the Gnostic controversy the church in Rome held firmly by the original teaching of the apostles and gained a reputation for orthodoxy which still further enhanced her prestige and made easier the assertion of a claim to authority over all other bishops, which, in later days, was the cause of so much contention. Irenaeus no

doubt reflected the opinion of Western Christianity at least, when, speaking of its steadfast loyalty, he says: 'Unto this church, on account of its more powerful lead, every church, meaning the faithful from everywhere, must needs resort; since in it, that tradition which is from the apostles, has always been preserved by those who are from everywhere (*qui sunt undique*).'[1]

And in the purely practical matter of almsgiving, this church had a wide reputation for generosity. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (*c.* 115 A.D.), in his letter to the Romans, written on his way to martyrdom in that city, says, perhaps with a natural exaggeration, that it 'takes precedence in charity.' There were certainly some rich men in the Christian congregation in quite early days; Marcion's gift of money, though in point of time it was a little later (*c.* 150 A.D.) than the period we are considering at the moment, cannot have been an isolated instance of generosity. Nor did Roman Christians rest content in relieving the distress among their own brethren; they were ready to aid those in need in other cities, and it was this readiness to share their good things which earned the praise which Ignatius bestowed upon them.

Circumstances and characteristics such as those noted in the foregoing paragraphs, gave to the possessor of the see of Rome a position enjoyed by no other bishop. Antioch, Ephesus, or Alexandria might and did claim special privileges over the church in their own area of jurisdiction; but they had neither the world-wide vision of a native-born Roman nor the political advantages in history, which would enable them to extend their influence beyond their own borders. Politically Rome was mistress

[1] Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* iii. 3 (Gwatkins's translations in *Selections from Early Christian Writers*).

of the world ; it is not surprising, even if all questions of peculiar spiritual authority be laid aside, that the Roman church should follow the example of the civil power, and begin to regard herself as in some sense the chief see in Christendom. Without doubt a primacy of honour was conceded to her in very early days ; but there is no instance of a Roman bishop claiming to act authoritatively outside his own diocese, until nearly the end of the second century ; and when that claim was made, it was promptly resisted, and could not be maintained.

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, visited Pope[1] Anicetus (154 A.D.) to discuss with him the date of Easter, for there was a difference of opinion as to the true reckoning. Anicetus made no attempt to impose the Western custom upon the East, and he and Polycarp parted on friendly terms, each content to follow the custom of the district over which he presided. But thirty-six years later, in 190 A.D., Pope Victor opened the question again and endeavoured to excommunicate the churches in Asia, because they did not follow the Western reckoning of the date of the Paschal feast. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, stoutly resisted him, saying that he was not affrighted by terrifying words, and that 'Those greater than I have said, "We ought to obey God rather than men."' Victor realized that opposition to his action was too great, and the matter ended there ; but it is important as showing that the church as a whole was not yet ready to submit to dictation from Rome, merely on the ground

[1] The title 'Pope' had no particular significance in early days. Bishops of Alexandria were often called popes ; Cyprian was known as 'the pope of Carthage.' The limiting of the title to the bishop of Rome was a gradual process, as the Roman claims were advanced and 'pope' came to have a special meaning. Throughout this book, wherever it occurs, the title is used for the bishop of Rome as a matter of convenience only.

that a particular practice had the authority of the church in that city.

The papacy of Callistus I. (217-222 A.D.) is a landmark in the growth of Roman claims. Among the sub-apostolic writings were several treatises and epistles ascribed to Clement, who was bishop of Rome from 89 to 98 A.D. Most of them are now known to be of later date than Clement, and they are of doubtful orthodoxy ; but in one important respect they influenced the church of the third century. In the so-called epistle of Clement to James, it is stated that before his death St. Peter had ordained Clement to be his successor, and to ' sit in his chair.' ' I communicate to him,' says the apostle, ' the power of binding and loosing, so that with respect to everything which he shall ordain in the earth, it shall be decreed in the heavens ; . . . Therefore hear him, as knowing that he who grieves the president of truth, sins against Christ, and offends the Father of all.' Irenaeus had given another story, naming Linus as the first bishop after the apostles. Linus, he says, was appointed jointly by St. Peter and St. Paul, and ' in the third place from the apostles, Clement received the episcopate.' [1] Callistus recalled the tradition that Clement was in a special sense the successor and representative of Peter, and used it in support of actions of his own, which marked a definite breach with customs universally prevailing at the time. He was prepared to grant absolution for most of those grave sins for which, as yet, the church said that there could be no forgiveness. He was, of course, in advance of his time, and in later days none questioned the wider clemency which he showed ; but its significance at the moment lay in the fact that he, Callistus, felt that he could break away from

[1] Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* iii. 3.

established custom, and decree new disciplinary regulations because he sat in the chair of Peter. A primacy due to political considerations, or a position of dignity unique because of the work of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome, might gladly be conceded; but this is the first recorded instance of a claim to authority in the realm of morals, above the universal practice of the church.

Cyprian's position is interesting, because he readily yields to Rome a unique place of honour, and yet is quite clear as to the limits within which her authority should be confined. In his treatise *Concerning the Unity of the Church*, he declares that in Peter, first of all, is the unity of the church to be found, for Christ gave apostolic authority first to him, and, afterwards, to all the apostles. Peter is the symbol of the oneness of the church, and the unity of the whole episcopate is derived through union with the bishop of Rome.[1] He pursues the same thought in several of his Epistles, but one instance will suffice. When writing to Pope Cornelius about the Novatianist schism, he speaks of the impudence of those who dare to carry letters from schismatics 'to the chair of Peter and to the principal church, whence the unity of the priesthood took its rise.'[2] But his appreciation of the dignity of Rome, and his sense that through the see of Peter the unity of the church finds expression and is preserved, did not prevent him from opposing claims of authority and jurisdiction, which would exalt Rome above the rest of the catholic episcopate.

Stephen, who succeeded Cornelius as bishop of Rome (after the see had been held for only eight months by Lucius), was a man of strong personality and arrogant temper. During his papacy the question of the re-

[1] *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, iv. [2] *Epp.* lix. 18.

admission of repentant heretics to the church was raised. Asiatic and African bishops had rebaptized them, but Stephen maintained that this was unnecessary. (In the end his view prevailed.) Councils held at Carthage in 256 A.D. reaffirmed the necessity, for a second baptism within the diocese of Carthage, though they carefully refrained from attempting to lay down a rule for the whole church. Stephen denounced Cyprian as ' a false Christ, false apostle, and deceitful worker,' and broke off all communion with the African church. Further, he declared that his primacy should be recognized by ' new and recent Christians.' This latter point is quite understandable : in all probability most of the Western sees had been founded from Rome, so that in a special sense Rome might be regarded as the mother church of the West. But Cyprian condemned Stephen's action as being *ultra vires* in both matters. He wrote : ' Neither did Peter, whom the Lord chose first, and on whom He built His church, when Paul afterwards disputed with him about circumcision, claim or assume anything insolently and arrogantly to himself ; so as to say that he held the primacy and should be obeyed of those late and newly come.' [1] A papal supremacy, such as became familiar to the Western church in later days, is clearly contrary to catholic order in the mind of Cyprian and stoutly to be resisted ; indeed it is evident from other testimony also that the ante-Nicene Fathers, though they undoubtedly regarded Rome as the centre of unity, did not look upon her as having authority over the whole body of the episcopate, or as being an infallible guide and the centre of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

The Arian controversy reacted favourably for Rome in that her reputation for orthodoxy was still further

[1] Cyprian, *Epp.* lxxi. 2.

enhanced, and she was able to promote her claims with greater force. It does not seem to have entered the minds of the bishops at the Council of Nicaea that Rome had the right to receive privileges above the other ancient sees; the sixth canon [1] of the council lays it down that the privileges of Alexandria should remain unimpaired, as were those of Rome. The bishop of Alexandria had jurisdiction over several neighbouring provinces, and it was his right and duty to consecrate all bishops within his area. The limits of jurisdiction exercised by the bishop of Rome were not clearly defined; probably he was regarded as metropolitan of the Italian dioceses at this time. That is a matter of no very great importance so far as this canon is concerned, for the point about the ruling given at Nicaea is this, that, in effect, Alexandria and Rome are treated exactly alike for purposes of jurisdiction.

But the events which followed the publication of the creed of Nicaea did much to increase papal authority. In an earlier chapter [2] reference was made to the council held at Sardica in 343 A.D., by the joint agreement of both Emperors. It was hoped that the unhappy divisions among Christians might be healed thereby; but it will be remembered that it failed utterly to achieve this end. The Eastern prelates departed to Philippopolis and held an independent council of their own; and the Western bishops, under the guidance of Hosius of Cordova, drew up rules for the hearing of appeals, which were of the utmost importance. At Nicaea it had been arranged that all the bishops in each province should meet twice yearly, in order to review the decisions of individual bishops, and if need be, to reverse or modify them. The intention was that there should always be an appeal for a bishop to the

[1] See below, p. 263. [2] See chap. viii. p. 196.

regularly convened synod of bishops of the province. The East was thoroughly familiar with the methods of provincial government in ecclesiastical affairs ; Antioch, Alexandria, and Ephesus had clearly defined limits, following the political arrangements of the Empire. But it was not so in the West. Christianity was slow to penetrate Northern and Western Europe, and the ordered provincial arrangements of the East were never reproduced in Latin Christianity.

However, even though no provincial synod could be summoned in the West, it was highly desirable that there should be some appeal from unjust or unorthodox decisions ; so the Council of Sardica drew up the following canons : (1) In a dispute between two bishops, a local synod of bishops should try the case, and if the defeated bishop was dissatisfied with their decision, he might request them to lay the case before the bishop of Rome, ' in honour of St. Peter.' If in the opinion of the Pope a fresh trial should take place, he (the Pope) must select judges from the local bishops. (2) If a local synod had deposed a bishop, he might appeal direct to Rome, asking for a new trial, and if such were ordered, the Pope might send delegates from his own court to assist the judges.

These are canons of a purely Western council, and could not affect the East, which had excommunicated the bishops at Sardica ; nor was there any authority given to the bishop of Rome to override the rights of a local synod. But they encouraged popes to interfere, as of right, in the affairs of other dioceses, and were used by Innocent I. in the next century to extend, still further, the area of papal jurisdiction.

It is true that by these canons the Pope, in effect, took the place of the Emperor, to whom, hitherto, appeals had

been made ; and it was desirable, and more consonant with the spiritual nature of the church, that purely ecclesiastical causes should be determined by ecclesiastical courts without interference from the State. It is unfortunate, however, that the ultimate result was to give the Pope a position of authority in Western Europe which was new and contrary to all the practice of the church hitherto, contravening rights which were inherent in the episcopate and shared by all bishops equally.

During the pontificate of Damasus (366-384 A.D.) the Emperor Gratian carried the regulations of the Council of Sardica one step further. He issued a rescript in 378 A.D., ordering all metropolitan bishops in the West, to regard themselves as under the jurisdiction of Rome. The see of Milan under St. Ambrose (*ob.* 397) had gained a position of great importance, and though there was no intention of rivalry as between Milan and Rome, a thoughtful observer might well see dangers in its rapidly increasing influence. This may account in part for Gratian's action ; he was certainly animated by political rather than ecclesiastical motives, since it would be more convenient from the civil point of view to centralize the administration of church law in Rome. So he gave further instructions that an accused bishop, under certain circumstances, must appear before the bishop of Rome, to be tried by him in person or by a council appointed by him. Thus the papacy was granted an authority in matters of law above that of the provincial synod.

Hitherto, in the progressive stages by which Rome was gaining a position of pre-eminence in the West (for it must be remembered that the East was not affected by the canons of a purely Western council nor by the rescripts of a Western Emperor), she had won that position in

temporal rather than spiritual matters. There lay behind, that sense of respect due to the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, to which Cyprian bears eloquent testimony. Political and geographical conditions had conspired to make her the central church of Western Christendom, and the claims of Peter's successors to universal spiritual authority—the ' Petrine claims ' as they are called—were as yet inarticulate. But with the election of Siricius to succeed Damasus in 384 A.D. these ' papal claims,' in the more modern sense of the word, began to find expression.

In accordance with Gratian's rescript, an appeal to Siricius had been lodged by some Spanish bishops ; the Pope's reply is the earliest extant example of those decretal epistles from Rome which steadily developed, from letters of advice, to formal directions and commands. In his answer Siricius says, ' We bear the burden of all, or rather, Blessed Peter bears them in us ' ; and he went on to direct that his reply to the question in dispute should be made known to the whole church of Spain, and to the bishops in Gaul and Africa, ' because none of the priests of the Lord ought to be ignorant of the statutes of the apostolic see.' This was the first time that temporal considerations were laid aside and a Pope definitely appealed to Peter as the sanction for his authority. But Innocent I. (401-417 A.D.), who was Pope during the early years of the Pelagian controversy, made good use of the precedent thus set.

Innocent was one of the strongest and most able of the early bishops of Rome, and he was elected to govern the church in that city at a time when political and ecclesiastical events would enable a man of strong personality to use the opportunity of the moment to further his chief aims. Constantinople and Alexandria were always jealous

of one another, and at the moment were engaged in controversy about the views of Origen. Alexandria was so far successful that her bishop, Theophilus, managed to secure the deposition of St. John Chrysostom from the bishopric of Constantinople. Theophilus informed Innocent of the sentence, and Chrysostom also appealed to Innocent, imploring his aid. The Pope readily perceived that the old sore of jealousy lay at the root of the trouble, and, severely reprimanding Theophilus, bade him appear before a general council which he hoped might shortly be held. But the Roman delegates were so badly treated at Athens, on their way to the council, which was to meet at Thessalonica, that they turned back, and the proposal had to be abandoned. Innocent had to content himself with renouncing communion with Chrysostom's opponents, and though he failed to secure his authority in the East, it is very significant that a bishop of Constantinople should have appealed to Rome. The capital of the Eastern Empire guarded its privileges no less jealously than Old Rome or Alexandria, and its bishop would not lightly take a step which might infringe his own authority ; but Innocent took the opportunity of declaring that Rome was the first see in Christendom, for the East no less than the West.

Innocent was absent from Rome when the Goths, under Alaric, sacked the city in 410 A.D. ; he was at Ravenna, taking counsel with the leading citizens for proposed negotiations between themselves and the barbarians. Not unnaturally, his gifts of leadership and his executive wisdom still further enhanced his dignity, and, out of the civil disorder, the church of Rome and her bishop emerged with yet greater claims to respect and authority.

Meanwhile the African provinces were sorely perplexed.

At the approach of the Goth Pelagius[1] had fled to Carthage, and there for seven years he expounded his heretical opinions, dividing the church of Africa into hostile camps. At last the orthodox party sent five of their number, including Augustine, the great bishop of Hippo, to Rome, to lay the case before Innocent, since he had already had some experience of Pelagianism in Rome. The tone of respect with which they approached him emboldened him to press the papal claims in matters in which none of his predecessors hitherto had definitely asserted a final authority. He said : ' Whenever a question of faith is raised, I think that all our fellow bishops ought to refer only to Peter.' It had never yet been suggested that the see of Peter was the source of all truth and the final arbiter in doctrinal disputes, but this was the implication lying behind Innocent's words. Nothing came of it at the moment, because Innocent died in the following year (417), and his successor, Zosimus, supported Pelagius for a time, and naturally the African church stoutly resisted any interference from one suspected of heresy. But Leo the Great adopted the same attitude in the Eutychian controversy, and in later times the Pope was regarded as supreme in doctrine as in jurisdiction, so far as the Western church was concerned.

In the matter of appeals also, Innocent went further than Siricius. Victricius, bishop of Rouen, was famous in Gaul for his missionary zeal, travelling even as far as Britain to guide the infant church in these islands. Perhaps his zeal and success caused jealousy to arise among his neighbours ; in any case he found it necessary

[1] An account of Pelagianism is outside the scope of this book. Its tenets have no bearing on the manner of Innocent's dealings with the African church.

to go to Rome and explain his position. Shortly after his return to his own diocese (404 A.D.) Innocent sent him a *Liber Regularum*, which was numbered, afterwards, among the papal decretals. He quoted the canons of Sardica as having been drawn up at Nicaea—this may have been an unintentional slip on his part—but he gave to them an interpretation which they had not borne before. He said that in more important matters, not only might an appeal be made to Rome, as the Sardican canons had decreed, but if he thought fit, the Pope might give an independent final decision. It may be argued that he was only carrying to its logical conclusion, the principle laid down at Sardica, encouraged by Gratian, and still further emphasized by Siricius ; but in strict truth it must be pointed out that Innocent thereby claimed for the papacy a final authority in matters of discipline, just as later, as we have already seen, he did in doctrine, when he was appealed to about Pelagianism.

With Leo the Great (440-461 A.D.) we must bring our considerations of the rise of the papacy to a close. It is a convenient point at which to do so, because, though his work had little result in the East, he succeeded in establishing that monarchical system of ecclesiastical government in the West, which continued without interruption or serious challenge till Western Christendom gave place to Nationalism in politics and religion, at the close of the mediaeval age. Further, he laid down explicitly the spiritual bases of papal authority, which have continued in the Roman church until the present day.

Like Innocent, Leo was a true born Roman, with all the wisdom and power of leadership which had distinguished so many sons of the imperial city, and had contributed, no less than military skill, to the wealth and success

of that Empire which owned her as mistress, from Tyne to Euphrates. Had he lived in pagan days he might have been an emperor, comparable to Augustus or Decius; it was inevitable that a man of his genius should attain to the highest rank in the society to which he belonged. To his other gifts he added a deep religious piety, which saved him from a bullying, hectoring manner in forwarding his claims, and made it all the more possible for them to be accepted by those already familiar with papal government. Also it was his good fortune to be called to preside over the see of Rome at a time when her civil rulers were weak, her authority called into question, her prestige dimmed, and the Goth everywhere triumphant. Alaric's presence in Italy had been of service to Innocent in the increased respect which his negotiation with the Goth brought to his see; but political conditions of a similar kind were yet more useful to Leo. When Attila the Hun pressed on towards Rome, after the temporary check which he had sustained at Châlons in 451 A.D., Leo went out to meet him, as his army streamed across the plains of northern Italy, and by his diplomacy bought off the invader and put an end to the Hun menace.

It was not upon political considerations, however, that Leo based his claim to supremacy, but upon the words of Christ to St. Peter, after the apostle's confession of his Godhead—'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church'[1]—and again, upon the power of binding and loosing given first to Peter,[2] and then to all the apostles.[3] Leo thus construed these passages: 'Whatever Christ gave to the other apostles, He gave only *through* St. Peter; the firmness which was given to Peter by Christ was conferred upon the other apostles by St.

[1] Matt. xvi. 18. [2] Matt. xvi. 19. [3] Matt. xviii. 18.

Peter; Peter is the prince of the apostles, and rules personally those whom Christ rules supremely.'[1] Leo's exegesis has been a subject of vexed controversy ever since he propounded it. He won the West to his point of view, and it was accepted there until the Reformation, but the East ignored it, and refused to grant to the see of Peter an authority above all other sees, or to accept the doctrine that Rome is the source whence all jurisdiction and spiritual power proceed. Neither the history of the controversy nor its doctrinal significance need detain us; our purpose is to show how the papacy gained its supremacy, not to justify or condemn it. It only remains to be noted in this connection, therefore, that though in form Leo's claim was new, and the question of papal supremacy taken entirely out of the sphere of political considerations, it was, nevertheless, the logical result of much that had gone before, and only stated explicitly what was implicit in the teaching of Innocent I. and Siricius, and could without much difficulty, be read into the canons of Sardica.

In Italy, except at Milan, which remained independent for some time, and in Spain his claims were not challenged; but in Gaul, Hilary of Arles refused to acknowledge Rome's right to interfere in a purely local quarrel. It was not to be expected that a man of Leo's calibre would ignore an attack of this kind. He persuaded the Emperor, Valentinian III., to issue an edict in 445 A.D. declaring that the bishops of Gaul were under the authority of the 'Venerable Pope of the eternal city'; and when Hilary died in 449 the bishops of the province sent a letter to Leo, so humble in tone, as to leave no doubt of their loyal submission to his rulings.

[1] These extracts are taken from St. Leo's *Sermons*, nos. iii. and iv.

He failed, however, to win over the East to obedience. The learning and deep piety exhibited in his 'Tome'[1] undoubtedly enhanced his prestige, and brought great honour both to himself and his see; but the Eastern ecclesiastical provinces had developed upon very different lines from those of the sister churches of the West, and could not accept the doctrinal bases upon which the Petrine supremacy rested. Though Leo gained a brilliant triumph over the Council of Chalcedon, as we shall presently see it was but momentary, and had no lasting influence upon the Greek and Asiatic churches.

Eutychianism gave him his opportunity in the East. Both Eutyches and Flavian[2] had appealed to the Pope, and the violent action of Dioscorus at the Robber Council had raised serious political difficulties with Alexandria (as has already been noticed). Leo hoped that the General Council, which Marcian had promised to call, might be summoned to Rome; but the Emperor was wise enough to see how necessary it was to preserve unity between the two sees of Old and New Rome; it will be remembered that, in spite of his close friendship with Leo, the council ultimately met at Chalcedon. There Leo's Tome was laid before the Fathers assembled, and it was a source of considerable annoyance to him, as it was significant, that instead of accepting it as it stood, and as Leo had expected them to do, they carefully examined its contents before finally declaring in its favour. Whatever the West might be prepared to do, the East hereby notified its refusal to acknowledge the bishop of Rome as the infallible teacher of the Catholic Church.

When the council had disposed of the Eutychian heresy,

[1] *Vide supra*, p. 215.

[2] *Vide supra*, p. 215.

it proceeded to consider the position of the archbishop of Constantinople. The 28th canon of the council proposed that Constantinople should enjoy the same privileges of honour as Old Rome, and that her archbishop should consecrate the metropolitan bishops of Asia, Pontus, and Thrace. The Eastern bishops declared that church authorities of an earlier day had awarded the first place (*primatum*) to Old Rome because it was the imperial city; and that at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D., having in mind the fact that Constantinople was by that time also an imperial city, they had decided that in ecclesiastical matters she should be magnified, and rank second only in honour to Rome. Leo's delegates objected on the ground that the proposed new canon contravened the terms of the 6th canon of Nicaea. This canon had recognized three principal sees, Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, as presiding over the churches in their own districts, and had given to Rome a primacy of jurisdiction over the 'suburbicarian churches,' *i.e.* the Christian congregations in middle and lower Italy, and in the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. But the Italian copies of the canon had an additional phrase: 'The Church of Rome always had the primacy.' The papal delegates at Chalcedon implied that at Nicaea, Rome had been given a universal primacy of jurisdiction. In vain the Eastern delegates showed that the Italian version was corrupt. Leo's representatives had been bidden to resist any attempt, such as was now being made, 'to alter what had been laid down by the Fathers.' Their protest was ignored, however, and the 28th canon was passed, though its opening phrase carefully safeguarded the peculiar honour due to Rome; it ran as follows: 'The first place above all others and the principal honour must,

according to the canons, be preserved to the archbishop of Old Rome.' [1]

Such a rejection of his claims was most galling to Leo, and he set to work to undo the mischief and get the canon rescinded. Under pressure from the Emperor Marcian, acting at the instigation of the Pope, the archbishop of Constantinople withdrew the canon in 454 A.D., and to outward appearances Leo had achieved his purpose and gained universal recognition as supreme bishop. But it was a hollow triumph; the Eastern metropolitan bishops refused to acknowledge the right of Constantinople to withdraw a canon of an oecumenical council, and continued to act according to the terms of the 28th canon of Chalcedon, being supported in their action by subsequent emperors. At the second council of Constantinople (680 A.D.) the canon was reaffirmed without the consent of Rome, and the Roman claims were ignored.

Thus in the East Leo's policy failed and the archbishops of the principal sees continued to exercise jurisdiction over the dioceses of their own provinces without reference to any authority higher than their own, or the united opinion of a General Council. His success in the West is intelligible, because there was no see of apostolic foundation west of Rome, and many sees were founded from the imperial city, as was Canterbury in the next century. But of greater influence than his spiritual arguments were the political events of the time. Under the steady advance of the Goths the western Empire was tottering to its fall. In the terror and confusion which accompanied its eclipse the church alone remained, preserving the ancient form of government and ordered life; thus when Romulus

[1] For a full treatment of the history of the 6th canon of Nicaea, see Bright, *Age of the Fathers*, vol. i. p. 104, and vol. ii. pp. 540-548.

Augustulus was allowed to abdicate in 476 A.D., the Roman bishop established an ecclesiastical monarchy, and gained for himself a position analogous to that hitherto occupied by the Emperor.

THE COMING OF THE GOTH

For two hundred years before its final collapse in 476 A.D. the Empire had been threatened by the nations of the North, and the story of that prolonged struggle is told in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Much of it has little immediate bearing upon church history. Now and again a fresh threat upon the Danube frontier turned the attention of a persecuting government from the supposed enemy in the midst to the undoubted foe on the borders, as in the reign of Decius (248-251), when for the first time the Roman provinces were invaded, and Decius himself fell in battle against the Goth. The dangers from without influenced Constantine in his treatment of the church ; it was essential that internal unity should be achieved and that the Empire should present a solid front to the foe. This was the primary motive behind his action in dealing with the Donatists and in granting toleration to Christianity as the favoured religion. So also the ebb and flow of that warfare, which was practically unceasing in the fourth century, affected the course of the Arian struggle. Valens' death at Adrianople in 378 A.D. finally turned the scales in favour of the orthodox party, so far as political influences were concerned. Only once, in the reign of Gallienus (259 A.D.), had Rome itself been seriously threatened, and then, in the absence of military leaders, the Senate had enrolled all able-bodied plebeians, and repelled the foe, almost in sight of the city. But the fifth century brought the Goth to Rome under Alaric in

410; it witnessed the withdrawal of the Hun, under Attila, owing to the political sagacity of Pope Leo I. in 451; it saw the overthrow of the Empire in 476; and, finally, the beginning of that intercourse between the Frankish kingdom and Rome, which culminated in the coronation of Charles the Great in 800, is dated from that century. Alaric's share in these events needs some detailed treatment, since it profoundly influenced the subsequent development of Western Christianity.

Alaric had been employed by Theodosius I. as leader of some Gothic auxiliaries, and had become master-general of the armies of Eastern Illyria. He had been converted to Christianity by Arian missionaries, who were most diligent in preaching to the Northern peoples. His contact with Roman civilization had filled him with a sense akin to awe at the greatness, dignity, and wisdom which still characterized Roman institutions, though corruption, indolence, and effeminacy were eating into the national life and making it a ready prey to the invader. Bryce [1] speaks of the respect, amounting almost to religious veneration, with which the barbarians regarded the imperial city. Though they pressed forward to encompass her ruin, the spell of a strong fascination lay upon them; Rome, the unconquered mistress of the world, the giver of all good to her subject people, even as she tottered to ruin, even as her streets re-echoed to the tramp of Alaric's invading horde, could win from her conquerors a homage rarely bestowed by victorious hosts.

Upon the death of Theodosius I. (395 A.D.) fresh hordes of barbarians poured down from the North, and Alaric, wearying, perhaps, of the endless intrigues between the military commanders, and spurred by an ambition which

[1] Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*, chap. iii.

could tolerate no position lower than the highest, forsook his Roman allegiance and was proclaimed king of the Visigoths, declaring his intention of finding in Italy a kingdom or a grave. His victorious army drove all before it, causing the Emperor, Honorius I., to flee in confusion from Milan, where he held his court, to some distant refuge in Gaul. Alaric was defeated by the Roman army, under Stilicho, at the battle of Pollentia (403). Stilicho, a pagan, determined to attack his foes as they were keeping the Easter festival; he fell upon them unprepared, and the Goths were compelled to retreat. Honorius returned in triumph to Italy, taking up his residence at Ravenna, and for the moment the danger was averted. But not for long. In 408 A.D. Alaric returned to the challenge, and marching to the very walls of Rome, besieged the capital for nearly a year. Only after the inhabitants had been reduced to abject misery by famine and plague did the Senate consent to negotiate with the barbarians. His terms were so severe, and the amount of ransom demanded so heavy, that the negotiators cried out: 'If such be your demands, O King, what do you intend to leave us?' 'Your lives,' replied the first conqueror of invincible Rome.[1]

The siege was raised and once more Rome hoped that the day of reckoning had passed; but it was not to be. Intrigues by Honorius led to a second siege in 410, and, weakened by the horrors of the previous year, the citizens could not hope to endure the like privations a second time; and besides this, treachery was at work. At midnight on August 24, 410, the gates of the city were opened and the Gothic host poured through the streets. Rome the invincible lay low before the barbarian. For three days the city was given over to pillage, but Alaric had given

[1] See Gibbon, *op. cit.* chap. xxxi.

orders that churches were to be spared ; thus while the Empire crumbled the Church remained.

It was as Alaric entered Rome that Augustine of Hippo began to write his great work, *De Civitate Dei*. It was twenty years later, when his treatise was completed and he lay dying, that the Vandals, victorious in Italy, crossed over to Africa and were knocking on the gates of Carthage. Augustine spent some sixteen years over the work, but he had published it in instalments, as they were finished, and he wrote entirely with a view to giving a Christian explanation of the calamities of the times. In the first five books (the whole work comprises twenty-two volumes), he answers those who complained that Christianity had failed to secure the world from barbarism, that God had forsaken His people, and that the world had gained nothing by abandoning its former pagan beliefs. The next five were devoted to an attack upon the folly of those who believed that Paganism was now avenging itself, and could offer at least as much as Christ and His apostles had offered to the first converts. And in the last twelve, those which are best known, and which have profoundly influenced Christian thought in the West, he contrasted the two polities—the earthly and temporal society, and the City of God, all-embracing, unconquerable, claiming as of right universal dominion over men's lives.

There can be no doubt that the Western church drew largely upon Augustine's imagery, and the papacy used his arguments in support of claims such as those which Leo put forward, twenty years after his death. From the coronation of Charles the Great in 800 A.D. to the end of the Middle Ages, the political theory of Europe was based upon the *De Civitate Dei* : Christendom was one commonwealth in which the two swords, of spiritual and temporal

power, were wielded by Pope and Emperor. St. Paul caught his vision of the universality of the Gospel from the fellowship of nations within the Roman Empire ; the preservation of the church, when that Empire fell from her high estate in the disaster of 410 A.D., inspired Augustine with the conception of the church as the City of God. The final overthrow of the Western Empire in 476 transferred to the bishop of Rome much of the authority and prestige of the Emperors, and established the papacy in a position which proved to be impregnable till the New Learning challenged its claims, and, over a large part of Europe, rejected its rule.

EPILOGUE

No 'stopping place' is ever satisfactory in the study of history : the opening sentence of this book began with the words, 'There is no splendid isolation in the progress of mankind.' It is comparatively easy to recognize how true this is when we look back over a period of centuries ; but it is most important to bear it in mind in trying to fix a date at which we may say that a movement is complete, or has spent its force. The break up of the Western Empire, to which our considerations have brought us, is perhaps as good an illustration of this point as may be found. The foundation of a line of Patrician kings in Italy under Theodoric, the growing importance of the Franks from the time of Clodvig, 'the eldest son of the Church,' and the unchallenged supremacy of the papacy in the West, spring directly out of the past, and cannot be appreciated without the background of the first five centuries of Christian life. In one sense those centuries may be regarded as scaffolding, and yet they are much more, for scaffolding is removed when the building round

which it is erected is completed. It is more accurate, perhaps, to regard them as foundations upon which the church of later days was built. But neither simile is really satisfactory ; anything which suggests a break in continuity, or the possibility of ignoring the past (as foundations are commonly hidden and ignored for practical purposes), is to misread utterly the significance of those early days. The work of the apostles, the early evangelists and the Fathers survived and was carried forward, to be applied and adapted to the changing circumstances of later days.

And yet the abdication of Romulus Augustulus is a convenient place at which to separate primitive from mediaeval church history. In organization and discipline, in doctrine and worship, the main questions had been settled. The handful of Christians, gathered round an apostle or body of elders, had grown into separate provinces in which scores of local churches were shepherded, each by its own priest, who was under the authority of his diocesan bishop, and he in turn looked for general guidance to the archbishop of the province, or the local synod of bishops. Again, questions of discipline, such as those raised by the Montanists and Donatists, had ended in the strengthening of the episcopate, in a growing sense of the unity of the Catholic Church, and the vital necessity for all to share her fellowship. The limits within which speculative thought might be regarded as legitimate had been defined by the credal statements of the fourth century, and a plumbline of orthodoxy established : Christians now had an answer to questions concerning the Trinity, or the Person of Christ, or the problem of evil ; and the answers they gave to their enquirers had behind them the collective wisdom and authority of oecumenical

councils. An official body of documents, the Holy Scriptures, had been put forth, and the *Canon of Scripture*, as it is called, completed; apocryphal writings were rejected, and only those books which had the general support of the Fathers, included. And lastly, in the spiritual life the normal methods of worship, the sacramental system, and the general habits of personal devotion had been established. The title 'The Church' had received a definite connotation; her laws and customs, her doctrine and discipline were known to all men within the limits of the civilized world, and the authority of her ministers, as stewards of the mysteries of God, universally recognized.

It was this Church of primitive days which went forward in the new age to carry the Gospel to Northern Europe, to Ireland and to Scotland, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, strengthened by the formative period of her early life, mature and systematized, yet bringing out of her treasures things new and old.

SHORT LIST OF BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

The following list of books is intended as a general guide to those who desire to study the early history of Christianity more fully. It only includes those which are readily accessible, and more or less popular in form. It is in no sense an exhaustive bibliography, nor does it contain books of a specialist character, such as, for example, on the growth of the Ministry or of Monasticism. There are references in the text to some books of this kind.

Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* (Selected Chapters.)

Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius.* (Macmillan & Co.)

Glover, *The Conflict of Religions in the early Roman Empire.* (Methuen.)

Cumont, *Les Mystères de Mithra.*
Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism.*
} Chicago Open Court Publishing Coy.

Frazer, *The Golden Bough.* (Selected Chapters.) (Macmillan & Co.)

Lecky, *European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne.* (Chapters 2-4.) (Longman & Co.)

Angus, *The Environment of Early Christianity.* (Duckworth & Co.)

Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before* 170 A.D. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries.* (Williams & Norgate.)

Duchesne, *The Early History of the Church.* 3 vols. (To the end of the fifth century.) (John Murray.)

Gwatkin, *Early Church History to* 313 A.D. 2 vols. (Macmillan & Co.)

Gwatkin, *Selections from Early Christian Writers.* (Macmillan & Co.)

Kidd, *Documents Illustrative of Early Church History.* 2 vols. S.P.C.K.

Lonsdale Ragg, *The Church of the Apostles.*
Pullan, *The Church of the Fathers.*
} Rivington.

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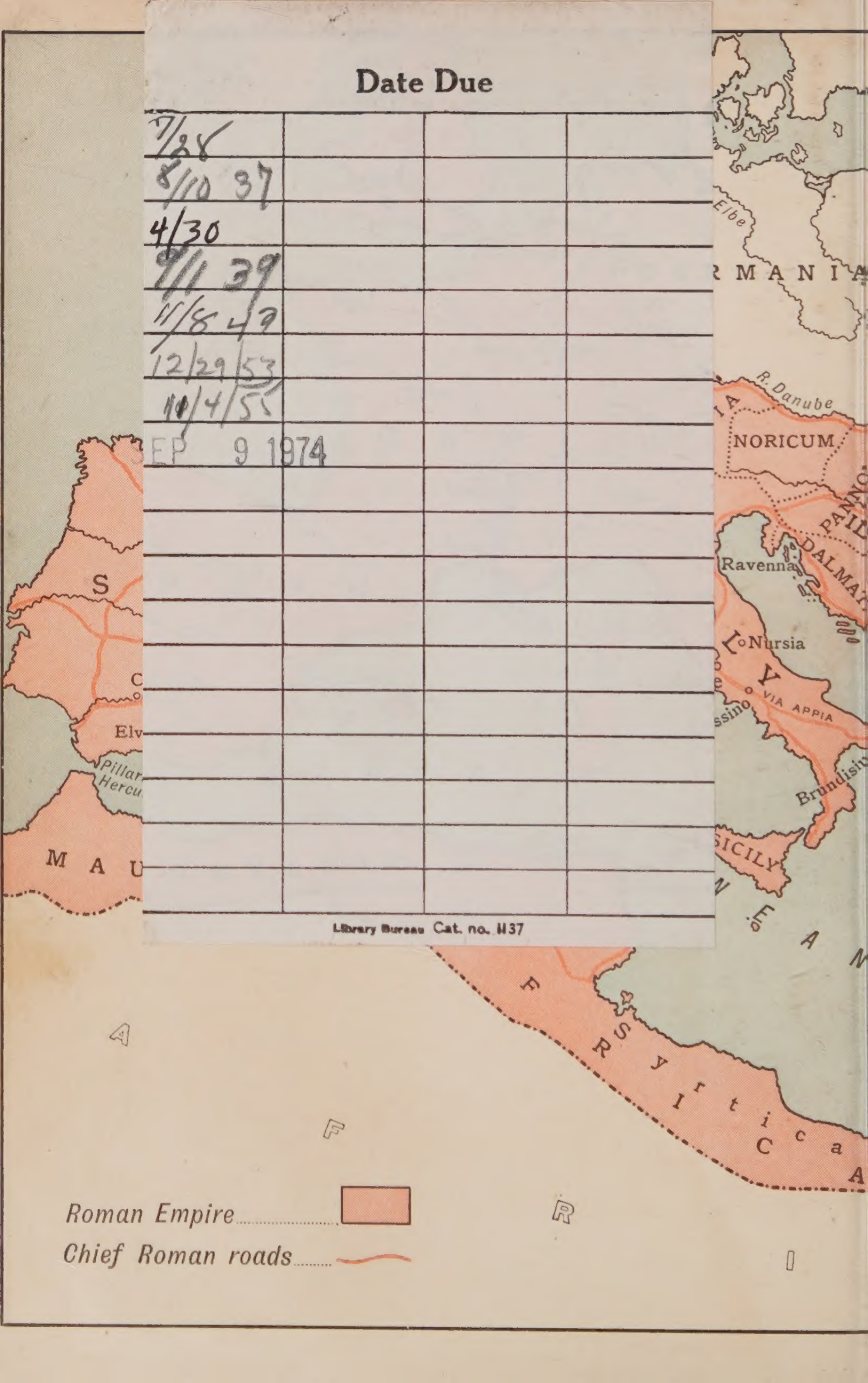

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